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JOHN OWEN'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

**A thesis presented for the degree of Master of Theology
at the University of Glasgow in partnership with
the Free Church of Scotland College**

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ABSTRACT

The doctrine of sanctification in Owen's works permeates his whole theology, and in many ways provides a key to his theological system. Specifically, the doctrine of the Trinity stands at the heart of Owen's teaching on the doctrine of sanctification.

According to the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra*, within the covenant of redemption, Owen keeps the incarnate Christ's proper work on earth within the context of the Triune God's common work. In this light the completed aspect of sanctification is interpreted.

Owen understands Christ's oblation to include not only his self-offering on earth, but also his ongoing intercession in heaven. The unity of oblation and intercession provides a key to understanding the progressive aspect of sanctification in Owen's thought. In heaven, Christ's mediatorial work as prophet, king, and high priest serves as the framework for the progressive aspect of sanctification. Moreover, the Holy Spirit himself is sent as a result of Christ's mediatorial work in heaven. As a result, a saint is united to Christ by the Spirit's proper work within the covenant of grace. At the moment when the saint is united to Christ, sin no longer has dominion and can never have the ultimate victory over him. This radical change gives us insight into definitive

sanctification by the Holy Spirit's proper work in the Triune God's common work. One of the most important aspects in definitive sanctification is that the saint can have communion directly with the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation. This communion is essential to the imitation of Christ. Wherever Owen states his desire for communion with God, he brings in the saint's duties. In other words, the idea of communion with the Triune God contains the idea of the saint's obligation. So, through the diligent exercise of divinely granted grace, the saint is able to mortify indwelling sin, because his communion with God in Christ brings fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection. Neither can the saint mortify sin without this communion. The Holy Spirit works in the saint, and with him, within the context of communion with God. Therefore, in Owen's thought a sovereign work of God, and human responsibility, are brought together for the increase of holiness.

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Introduction

The nature of Christian spirituality has been widely debated throughout the history of the church. The doctrine of sanctification was one of the main fissures separating Luther from the Catholic Church. Even today different groups of Protestants disagree on how we draw closer to God.¹ What distinguishes the different positions and what exactly is at stake in these recurring debates? To answer these questions, the dissertation analyses and examines John Owen's teaching on sanctification and its relevance for contemporary Christianity. This doctrine permeates his whole theology, and in many ways provides a key to his theological system.

Specifically, the doctrine of the Trinity stands at the heart of Owen's teaching on the doctrine of sanctification. It is, of course, a standard criticism of Western theology in general and Protestant theology in particular, that this doctrine has been routinely neglected throughout the centuries. However, this is not the case, as this study of John Owen demonstrates. My goal is to determine specifically how Trinitarian doctrine

¹ See Donald L. Alexander, ed. *Christian Spirituality- Five Views of Sanctification*; Melvin E. Dieter, *Five Views on Sanctification*; David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England*; J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*.

shaped Owen's doctrine of sanctification, and what benefits accrued from it.

John Owen was born of Puritan parents at Stadham in Oxfordshire in 1616. At twelve years of age, he was admitted to Queen's College, Oxford, where he took his B.A. degree in 1632 and M.A. in 1635.² And soon afterwards he was ordained deacon, and then proceeded to study the seven-year course for the degree of B.D.³

In 1637 he was driven from Oxford for his refusal to comply with the requirements of Laud's new statutes.⁴ After that, he became chaplain and tutor in the family of Sir Robert

² Sinclair B Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 1-2; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian*, 5-6.

³ For the Oxford theology curriculum in the seventeenth century, particularly as it connects to the controversial contexts, see Nicholas Tyacke, 'Religious Controversy' in idem(ed), *The History of the University of Oxford IV: Seventeenth- Century Oxford*, 569-619 cited from Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 2; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 2.

⁴ W. Orme, *Memoirs of Life, Writing and Religious Connexions of John Owen*, 13 Cited from Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 2.

Dormer of Ascot in Oxfordshire.⁵ But as the civil war broke out there, he moved to London.⁶ For a while he lived in Charter-House Yard, troubled by religious questions.⁷ However, his doubts were removed by a sermon preached by an unknown substitute preacher in Aldermanbury Chapel, where he had gone intending to hear the famous Presbyterian, Edmund Calamy.⁸

His first publication, *The Display of Arminianism* (1642), was dedicated to the Committee of Religion, and led to his being presented to a living in Fordham, Essex.

⁵ According to Ferguson, This was the most satisfactory way for a conscientious man (Owen) to avoid a clash with the ecclesiastical authorities, and it also provided an opportunity for private thought and theological study, Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 2.

⁶ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 3.

⁷ A. Thomson, *Life of Dr Owen*, Edinburgh, 1850, John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 1: XXIX.

⁸ John. Asty, "Memomoris of the Life of John Owen", 5 cited from Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian*, 12-13; J. H. Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 68.

Here he was married and by his marriage he had eleven children.⁹

At Fordham in Essex, in the midst of much physical suffering, he wrote the book entitled *'The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished'* published in 1643 which dealt with certain aspects of the problem of Church government,¹⁰ as well as writing two short catechism in 1645.¹¹

In 1651, Owen was appointed Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.¹² Before 1651 he had already become acquainted with Oliver Cromwell.¹³ In March 1651 Cromwell, as Chancellor, gave him the deanery of Christ Church, and made him Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford in September 1652.¹⁴ In October 1653, he was one of several

⁹ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 3.

¹⁰ Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 71; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 4.

¹¹ Owen, *Works*, 1: 464 cited from Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 71.

¹² Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 9.

¹³ Thomson, *Life of Dr Owen*, Edinburgh, 1850 cited from Owen, *Works*, 1: XLII.

¹⁴ Orme, *Memoirs of Life, Writing and Religious Connexions of John Owen*, 143 cited

ministers whom Cromwell summoned to a consultation on church union.¹⁵ In December of the same year he had the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred upon him by his university.¹⁶

In the midst of these activities, he wrote several books such as *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* in 1653,¹⁷ *The Doctrine of The Saint's Perseverance* in 1564,¹⁸ *Vindiciae Evangelicae* in 1655,¹⁹ *Of The Mortification of Sin in Believers* in 1656²⁰, *Communion With God* in 1657,²¹ and *Pneumatologia* in 1674.²²

Following this, many books were written by Owen. Even in old age and in spite of

from Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 10; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 81.

¹⁵ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 10-11.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11; Thomson, *Life of Dr Owen*, Edinburgh, 1850 cited from Owen, *Works*, 1: LIV.

¹⁷ Owen, *Works*, 10: 480.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11: 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 12: 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 6 : 2.

²¹ Ibid., 2: 2.

²² Ibid., 3: 1.

suffering from severe asthma and gallstones, he was able to write his great work on *Justification*.²³ He also published tracts defending Protestantism on the whole and the Puritans especially.²⁴

He died at Ealing, and was buried on September 4, 1683, in Bunhill Fields.²⁵

One of Owen's main pre-occupations was holiness. This appears clearly in the preface to the book entitled: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. The book is based on sermons he preached to the students and academic community at Oxford. In it, Owen states: "I hope I may own in sincerity that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life ... are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things."²⁶ In particular, Owen recognized that holiness was not merely the *goal* of all true learning; it is also the *means* of more

²³ Ibid., 5: 3-6 cited from Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 17.

²⁴ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 17.

²⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁶ Owen, *Works*, 6: 4 cited from Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 19.

true learning. As a result, Owen passionately pursued a personal communion with God.²⁷ Editions of his books were published every year between 1800 and 1860.²⁸ William H. Goold produced the definitive edition of Owen's works from 1850 to 1855²⁹, which contained twenty-four volumes, including Owen's Latin speeches and writings. The volumes 1-16 were reprinted in Edinburgh, by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1965, and the last seven volumes of the Goold set, which contain Owen's Hebrews commentary, were also reprinted (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

Beyond such reprinting, over the last thirty years there has been a steadily growing

²⁷ See Ferguson, "John Owen on Christian Piety" *Banner of Truth* 191-192, 47-60, Ferguson, "John Owen on Christian Piety" *Banner of Truth* 194, 6-19; David M. King, "The Affective Spirituality of John Owen," 223-233.

²⁸ Note that abridgements of Owen's writings testify to his popularity and wide readership during this time. E.g., W. Wilson, ed., *Selections from the Works of John Owen* cited from Kelly M Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 19.

²⁹ See Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, 369 cited from Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 19.

interest in the scholarship of Owen. Unfortunately, however, studies of Owen's teaching on sanctification are scarce. One such study is Dale A. Stover's Ph.D. dissertation at McGill University, published as *The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology*. In this thesis, Stover dealt with the extensive pneumatology and covenantal emphasis in Owen's theology. A Ph.D. dissertation by Rindal Gleason, at Dallas Theological Seminary, published as *John Calvin and John Owen on mortification- a comparative study in Reformed spirituality*, usefully contrasts John Calvin and John Owen's teaching on mortification. Steve Griffiths' volume, *Redeem the Time- The problem of sin in the writings of John Owen*, demonstrated Owen's viewpoints on sin and society, sin and the church, sin and the need for holiness. J. H. Yoon's Ph. D. dissertation at university of wales, *The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity*, analyzed and examined critically the implication of John Owen's teaching on mortification compared with other Puritan writers, and for modern Christianity. And in his Ph. D. dissertation at Kings College, published as *Communion with God: the Divine and Human in the Theology of John Owen*, Kelly. M. Kapic concentrated on communion with God in Owen's theology. In particular, he analyzed Owen's anthropology from the viewpoint of the relationship between God and humanity. These works continue to encourage interest

in Owen both for pastoral and academic purposes.

Concerning Owen's beliefs, interestingly, there can be found amongst today's scholars a consistent thread of thought. Such scholars highlight the fact that Owen's theology should be described and explained in terms of dogmatic, historical, intellectual and polemical contexts. Owen's thought was influenced by many differing traditions, including English puritanism, continental reformed orthodoxy, scholasticism, and patristic thought. In addition, Owen was also influenced by Aristotelianism, and humanism.³⁰ These varied influences can be evidenced in *Bibliotheca Oweniana sive*

³⁰ See Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 181-203, Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen*, 21-46; Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology*, 13-46, Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context", in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 253-275, Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 5-33.; Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing the Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy", 345-375, Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing the Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy 2", 125-160, Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca.*

Catalogus librorum (London: Edward Millington, 1684), which consists of almost a three thousand book list of John Owen, including not only patristic, mediaeval and contemporary theology, but also fine collections of philosophy, history, geography, and travel.

In the light of these influences, our study seeks to explore Owen's doctrine of sanctification. We begin by exploring Owen's theological framework. Here we will focus on three different assessments of the central theme in Owen's doctrine of sanctification: the dialectical interpretation (God's grace and Man's duty), the covenant interpretation (union with Christ), and the anthropocentric interpretation (the combat against sin). Chapter two explores the Trinitarian framework of Owen's doctrine. Here we find that the foundation of Owen's doctrine of sanctification is the inner life of the Trinity: objective and subjective sanctification is based upon specific, individual roles for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the covenant of redemption. Special attention will be given to Owen's reflections on the Holy Spirit's work in relation to Christ's humanity. Chapters three and four show exactly how Owen wedded the covenantal trinitarianism of Reformed orthodoxy, including its emphasis on the outworking of the divine decree in history, with the doctrine of sanctification. Chapter

1520 to Ca. 1725 (Vol 1 and 2).

three takes us to the core of our study: the objective aspect of sanctification. Here we examine Owen's creative attempt to set Christ's "proper" work within the "common work" of the three trinitarian persons. Here, the most important point is that the Spirit-empowered human nature of Christ is the pattern for the renewed image of God in the lives of the saints. This point will be illustrated by looking at Owen's discussions on the person of Christ, and His threefold office. We will see that the purpose of the ongoing intercession of Christ in heaven is closely related to His oblation on earth. Christ's "proper" work as the high priest, king, and prophet in heaven serves as the framework of the progressive aspect of sanctification. Chapter four deals with the subjective aspects of sanctification. We will see that divine sovereignty and human moral impotence demand the Holy Spirit's "proper" work. Definitive sanctification results in the end of sin's dominion in the saint. Here we will find that the union with Christ, accomplished by the Holy Spirit's "proper" work, is the fruit of the covenant of grace. And we will observe that communion with God is the way to carry the union into execution. Here it will become clear that one of Owen's unique contributions to the concept of progressive sanctification is the saint's distinct communion with each person of the Godhead under the terms of the covenant of grace. That communion between God and the saint serves as the backbone of his vivification and mortification within the dynamic equilibrium

between grace and duty.

The conclusion draws together the main themes of this dissertation and gives a brief appraisal of Owen's teaching on sanctification.

Chapter 1

The Theological Framework of Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification

The study of seventeenth century Reformed Orthodoxy has received more attention in the past thirty years than it received in the earlier part of the 20th century. In general assessments of the continuities and discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy, Richard Muller has identified the main change as one from dogmatically driven researches of the seventeenth century to narrowly concentrated historical expositions.³¹ From the approach of historical expositions, Sebastian Rehnman and Carl Trueman have show that the sources of Owen's theology include the Reformed tradition of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Augustinianism, the medieval scholars (Anselm,

³¹ Muller, "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy", 345-375, "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy 2", 125-160. See also Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism - A Review and Definition," in *Reformation and Scholasticism- An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 45 - 64.

Lombard and Aquinas), humanism and Aristotelians.³² Carl Trueman also argues that Puritan works are not to be viewed as abstract dogmatic treatises, but to be treated in their historical context, both synchronic and diachronic.³³

Given the above, to approach Owen's doctrine of sanctification directly, without accounting for its historical, intellectual, theological and polemical context, would be highly unproductive.

Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to explore Owen's theological framework, recognizing not only the synchronic trajectory, but also the diachronic. In what follows, I shall endeavour to classify three perspectives governing Owen's approach.

³² Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism - An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 181-203, Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen*; 21-46; Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 253-275, Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 13-46, Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 5-33.

³³ Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 253-275.

1.1 Dialectical Interpretation: God's Grace and Man's Duty

It is not surprising that while Owen's theology can be located within a developing tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy including Dort and Westminster, his career has been represented as that of a High Orthodox theologian who witnessed the full and final development of the Reformed system before the great change in philosophical and scientific view that would, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, utterly recast theological systems.³⁴ As Muller points out, the period of High Orthodoxy has been described as a time when the dogmatic codifications were no longer continued, but reformed theology engaged polemically with a new host of opponents.³⁵

At the same time, as Trueman asserts, "Owen's learning found expression in his many theological writings, and these writings were themselves shaped by the polemical concerns which dominated his life."³⁶

³⁴ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 1: Prolegomena to Theology*, 31-33, 73-84, 194-220; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 13-44.

³⁵ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 1: Prolegomena to Theology*, 73-84, 194-220.

³⁶ Trueman, "John Owen as a theologian," in *John Owen - the man and his theology*, 51.

1.1.1 The Arminians' Challenge to God's Grace

Owen's theological opponents can be grouped into five broad categories: Arminianism, Socinianism, Baxterianism, Antinomianism and Quakers. Of these five, to Owen, Arminianism was one of the most dangerous schools of heretical theology because the Arminians' notion of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) was not merely a speculative problem concerning the way in which God knows future contingents and conditionals - it was a broader theological problem concerning the underlying intention of the theory of *scientia media*, namely the affirmation of a synergistic soteriology.³⁷ In this connection, Berkhof declares that "according to the Arminians, regeneration is not exclusively a work of God, nor exclusively a work of man. It is the fruit of man's choice to cooperate

³⁷ Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 102-133, Trueman, "John Owen as a theologian," in *John Owen -the man and his theology*, 51-59; Dewey D Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination-Grace in English Protest Theology, 1525-1695*, 79-111; Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms-Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 274-275. See also Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy*.

with the divine influences exerted by means of truth.”³⁸

According to Heinrich Heppe, God’s providence in Reformed Theology includes “a threefold activity, preservation... concurrence or co-operation with second causes, and government.”³⁹

From the very inception of Owen’s publishing career with *A Display of Arminianism* in 1642, he argues in support of these three aspects against the Arminians:

That the effectual grace which God useth in the great work of our conversion, by reason of its own nature,-being also the instrument of and God’s intention for that purpose,- doth surely produce the effect intended, without successful resistance, and solely, without any considerable co-operation of our own wills, until they are prepared and changed by that very grace. The infallibility of its effect depends chiefly on the purpose of God. When by any means he intends a man’s conversion, those means must have such an efficacy added unto them as may make them fit instruments for the accomplishment of that intention, that the counsel of the Lord may prosper, and his word not return empty. But the manner of its operation,-that it requires no human assistance, and is able to overcome all repugnance,-is proper to the being of such an act as wherein it doth

³⁸ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 478.

³⁹ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 256.

consist.⁴⁰

Quite unlike High Orthodox theologians, the Arminians such as John Goodwin, William Laud, John Cosin and Richard Neile assert that the purpose of God's eternal decree is not to cause providential order of the world. That is, providence is not only subordinate to an eternal decree; it is also subordinate to creation. Here, Arminians draw heavily on the principle that God's providential governance of creation conforms to the order established by God in the act of creation. As a result, the chief part in salvation is to be ascribed to human being.

On the other hand, Owen's understanding of God's providence is that he does not regard "God's causal priority and decrees as in any way precluding contingency within the realm of creation. Thus, contingency in the realm of secondary causes does not imply freedom from necessity with regard to the First Cause."⁴¹

Given the above, Owen further argues that "the Arminians had tried to clear human nature from the heavy imputation of being sinful. He declares the root of Arminianism to be the exaltation of human self-sufficiency, an effort like that of old in building the

⁴⁰ Owen, *Works*, 10: 133. "Italics His"

⁴¹ Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 117. See Owen, *Works*, 10: 22.

tower of Babel."⁴²

Opposing the Arminians in the context of the Augustian doctrine of original sin and depravity, Owen affirms that the human state after the fall, included darkness (in the mind; which is the leading and ruling faculty), depravity (in the will) and death (in the soul).⁴³

In analysing this, Owen holds the necessity for a work of renewal, namely, conversion or regeneration, which is the internal, especial, immediate, supernatural, effectual, enlightening act of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴

It is interesting that, for Owen, the *terminus ad quem* of the effectual vocation and calling by the conversional work of the Holy Spirit is union between Christ and his saints. By his free and gracious act, God

calleth and translateth us from the state of nature, sin, wrath, and corruption, into the state of grace and union with Christ, by the mighty,

⁴² Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695*, 105; Owen, *Works*, 10: 6-7, 11, 13, 53, 57, 73, 80, 94-97, 122-123.

⁴³ Owen, *Works*, 3: 242-282.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 282-337.

effectual working of his Spirit in the preaching of the Word.⁴⁵

In particular, concerning the union with Christ, Owen holds that the saint's union with Christ affects not only his freedom from the law, but also his death to sin, for he is united to Christ both in his death under the law and his simultaneous death to sin.⁴⁶

In this connection, Ferguson writes that, "effectual calling into this union thus involves regeneration and produces a radical change in both status (justification) and life (sanctification)."⁴⁷

It is here that we see a major theme in Owen's theology - the close tie between sanctification and justification:

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:486.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 130; Owen, *Works*, 7:550. Cf. Nothing expresses the riches of this teaching more eloquently than the Westminster Confession of Faith: They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of whole body of sin is destroyed, *The Confession of Faith* (U.S.A: Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1990), 43.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 33.

whereas it is *effectual vocation* that is intended, wherein a holy principle of spiritual life, or faith itself, is communicated unto us, our *sanctification* radically, and as the effect in its adequate immediate cause, is contained in it. Hence, we are said to ‘be called to be saints,’ Rom. 1. 7; which is the same with ‘being sanctified in Christ Jesus,’ 1 Cor. 1.2. And in many other places is *sanctification* included in *vocation*.⁴⁸

This argument in Owen’s perspective offers a strand of evidence that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used not of a process where sanctification has both a divine and a human aspect, but of a once for all definitive act of God the Spirit in effectual calling, like justification and adoption. Hence, Owen’s major point of disagreement on this issue with the Arminians is that sanctification together with justification is neither self-induced nor created in humans by divine fiat.

This is reflected in the following hypothetical question posed by Owen: Must we be holy and obedient before being united?⁴⁹ Owen offers a three-fold answer to this vital question.

⁴⁸ Owen, *Works*, 5: 131. “Italics His” See also *ibid.*, 9:290-291.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3: 517.

Firstly, Owen asserts that if this is true, “then indeed are we not beholden in the least unto the *Spirit of Christ* that we are holy, and obedient, and like to Christ; for he that hath the Spirit of Christ is united unto him, and he who is united to him hath his Spirit and none else”.⁵⁰ Thus, “for my part, I have no esteem or valuation of that holiness, as holiness, which is not the immediate effect of the Spirit of sanctification”.⁵¹

Secondly, for Owen, the union with Christ “is granted that ordinarily the Lord Christ, by the *dispensation* of his *word*, by *light* and convictions thence ensuing, doth prepare the souls of men in some measure for the *inhabitation* of his Spirit”.⁵²

Thirdly, Owen denies that his position implies that Christ unites “*impure or ungodly sinners*” with Himself, so that they should be united, and yet continue impure and ungodly: “for in the *same instant* wherein any one is united unto Christ, and by the same act whereby he is so united, he is *really* and *habitually purified and sanctified*”.⁵³ Thus, “the Spirit of Christ, communicated from him for our union with him, is the cause and author of all grace and evangelical holiness in us, it is evident that we receive it directly

⁵⁰ Ibid. “Italics His”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. “Italics His”

⁵³ Ibid. “Italics His”

from Christ himself; which gives it the difference from all other habits and acts pleaded for".⁵⁴

Here, it becomes ever more certain that Owen's soteriology upheld not only Augustine's anti-Pelagian tradition, but also the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*.

1.1.2 The Antinomians' Challenge to Man's Duty

Antinomians also challenged the Orthodox for giving too much attention to human choice and responsibility. Indeed, "there are hints that Antinomians themselves exploited the growing godly paranoia over Arminianism to undermine their mainstream puritan opponents."⁵⁵

According to David R. Como, Antinomianism can be identified in two basic but distinct types. The two basic types are "inherentist (perfectionist)" and "imputative."⁵⁶

Antinomians in the inherentist strain such as John Everarde, Roger Brearley, and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 518.

⁵⁵ D. R. Como, *Blown By the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England*, 37; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination- Grace in English Protest Theology, 1525-1695*, 112-157.

⁵⁶ Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 38-46.

Christopher Taylor argue that although believers were being utterly reborn in the spirit as the seed of God, yet:

This was not a change or mutation in the believer's pre-existing body or soul, rehabilitation of previously corrupt faculties; it was, rather, a "new creation" ex nihilo,⁵⁷ likened to the creation of the world from nothing, which God overlaid above and against the old, and hopelessly corrupt flesh. But what was this "new creature"?... it is clear...that it had nothing at all to do with the fallen, created universe. It was "new" only insofar as it was utterly distinct from the "old man," for it was in fact a participation in the most ancient of all beings. It was, to be blunt, a "partaking of the godly nature" of Christ. Because they were joined to Christ (much as Christ's godly nature was joined to his humanity) they possessed Christ's perfection and sinlessness... This perfection was not completely manifested in this life, due to the ongoing presence of the "old man," which continued on occasion to break forth and sin.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John Everarde describes the new created man as 'deiformity', that is, the believer is no longer man but gods, cited from Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 252-253.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 357-358. According to Como, this mode of Antinomian thought owed much to the teachings of Hendrik Niclaes (1502-1580), the messianic founder of the Family of Love, see Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 38.

In other words, while celebrating and emphasizing Christ's perfection and sinlessness in the believers, the good works of believers were apparently nothing more than the motions of the spirit of Christ, dwelling in the believer.⁵⁹ Thus, for the Antinomians in the inherentist strain, when the flesh of believers acted on its own, it could do nothing but sin.⁶⁰

Meantime, the second type, Antinomianism in the imputative strain of John Eaton, John Satmarsh, and Tobias Crisp, tends to assert that although appearing before God as "perfect, just and sinless, the believers were not inherently pure, but rather rendered imputatively perfect via the exogenous holiness of Christ."⁶¹ John Eaton argued against the Antinomians in the inherentist strain that "far from being objectively and inherently perfect in this life, justified sinners retained the remnants of sin within them".⁶² Hence,

⁵⁹ According to Roger Brearley, the argument that true Christians could not sin was possible because an intimate union existed between them and God, see Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 302.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 325-380, 38-46. In this way, the Antinomians assert that "all the activity of a beleever is to act to sinne... The Spirit acts most in the Saints, when they indeavour least" cited from David D Hall, ed. *The Antinomian controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 228-231.

⁶¹ Ibid., 40.

⁶² Ibid., 184.

believers are perfect imputatively, but not inherently. This type was the most influential strain of antinomianism and more dangerous in the sense that it hewed more closely to the mainstream reformed doctrine of justification.⁶³

Furthermore, the Antinomians in the imputative strain, argued that because the mainstream of English puritans affirmed the paramount need for believers to abstain from sin and to do good works, Christ's death to save oneself was not enough; the saint remained fully under the obligation of moral law.⁶⁴ In all of these concerns, they were willing to concede that the portrayal of sin and the declaration of sin's penalty were not wholly useless to believers, for it kept them near to Christ. But they did not allow morality to be taught to believers,⁶⁵ because to preach "law" and "duty" could give the impression that salvation is somehow conditional on the performance of the works prescribed, and thus unwarrantably trouble the believer's conscience and impair his comfort. Thus, they denounced any attempt to infer the believer's assurance from an outward change or work.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid., 40-46.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 175-218. See also 40-46.

⁶⁵ Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the thought of Richard Baxter*, 360.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Owen, alongside other High Orthodox theologians such as Baxter, Rutherford, Turretin, referred to the Antinomians' belief as theological heresy.⁶⁷ With regard to sanctification, his response to the Antinomians seems to have two aspects. The first aspect is an emphasis on the indispensable role in Christian sanctification of renewed human faculties:

Wherefore, all sanctified believers have an ability and power, in the renewed mind and understanding, to see, know, discern, and receive, spiritual things, the mysteries of the gospel, the mind of Christ, in a due and spiritual manner.⁶⁸

What is true of the understanding is also true of the will:

In those who are renewed by the Holy Ghost and sanctified, it acknowledgeth and teacheth a freedom of will, not in an indifferency

⁶⁷ See Owen, *Works*, 5: 145-146, 377-378, 7:133, 12:592; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination- Grace in English Protest Theology, 1525-1695*, 83-157; Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial triumph and Faith*, 217-270; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Vol.2), 141-145; Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the thought of Richard Baxter*, 351-370.

⁶⁸ Owen, *Works*, 3: 493.

and flexibility unto good and evil, but in a power and ability to like, love, choose, and cleave unto God and his will in all things. The will is now free from its bondage unto sin, and being enlarged by light and love, willet and chooseth freely the things of God, having received spiritual power and ability so to do.⁶⁹

Equally, the believer is renewed in his affections:

The Holy Ghost in our sanctification doth work, effect, and create in us a new, holy, spiritual, vital principle grace... It causeth the *affections* to cleave and adhere unto them (spiritual duties) with delight. "How do I love thy law!" saith David; "my delight is in thy statutes; they are sweeter unto me than the honey-comb."⁷⁰

The Antinomians, as noticed above, assert that regeneration does not renew the faculties of understanding, will, affections and memory, because the believer's exalted state through the inhabitation of Christ's spirit in his soul has been "Christed with Christ and Godded with God."⁷¹ However, Owen argues:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 495.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 496-498. "*Italics His*"

⁷¹ Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 39.

If we are spiritually renewed, all the faculties of our souls are enabled by grace to exert their respective powers toward this glorious object. This must be done in various duties, by the exercise of various graces, as they are to be acted by the distinct powers of the faculties of our minds.⁷² Thus, The Holy Spirit so worketh *in us* as that he worketh *by us*, and what he doth in us is done by us.⁷³

Owen's grand strategy in rebutting the Antinomians in the 'imputative' strain appears in his development of the intricate theme of the relationship between covenant grace and covenant obligation:

God doth work the grace of the covenant, and communicate the mercy of it, antecedently unto all ability for the performance of any such duty ... Amongst those who are equally diligent in the performance of the duties intended he makes a discrimination, preferring one before another... Though there are no conditions properly so called of the whole grace of

⁷² Owen, *Works*, 1: 320.

⁷³ Ibid., 3:204. "Italics His" Baxter also holds that all faculties in the saint are radically renewed at the time of regeneration, see Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the thought of Richard Baxter*, 323-345. Cf. Tomas Goodwin also blasts the Antinomians in the inherentist strain, see Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Vol.6), 189-191.

the covenant, yet there are conditions in the covenant, taking that term, in a large sense, for that which by the order of divine constitution precedeth some other things, hath an influence into their existence; for God requireth many things of them whom he actually takes into covenant, and makes partakers of the promises and benefits of it. Of this nature is that whole obedience which is prescribed unto us in the gospel, in our walking before God in uprightness; and there being an order in the things that belong hereunto, some acts, duties, and parts of our gracious obedience, being appointed to be means of the further additional supplies of the grace and mercies of the covenant, they may be called conditions required of us in the covenant, as well as duties prescribed unto us. The benefits of the covenant are two sorts :(1) The *grace and mercy* which it doth collate. (2) The *future reward* of glory which it doth promise.⁷⁴

Owen believes that these two seemingly disparate factors work together in dynamic equilibrium in two ways, pointing out that there are two types of promise in the covenant of grace, unconditional, and conditional, both of which work in complementary partnership and that God's grace effects His decrees by working in the saint in a way of concurrence. In the same sense, Owen argues that "this is the glory of covenant

⁷⁴ Owen, *Works*, 23: 136-137 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 22:136-137). "Italics

His"

promises, that, as unto the communication of the grace of conversion and sanctification unto the elect, they are absolutely free and unconditionate.”⁷⁵

While overemphasizing the grace of justification and Christ’s imputed righteousness at the expense of personal sanctification, the imputative Antinomians differentiated the old covenant from the new covenant, but Owen reconciles them in the concept of the covenant of grace as a covenant of grace and obligation. Francis Turretin makes a similar statement:

And as to the covenant, everyone knows that it consists of two parts: on the one hand the promise on the part of God; on the other the stipulation of obedience on the part of man. For as God promises in it to be our God, he wishes that we also in turn should be his people. And as that promise includes every blessing of God, so the obligation denotes the duties of all kinds owed by man to God... Although God by his special grace wishes these duties of man to be his blessings (which he carries out in them), still the believer does not cease to be bound to observe it, if he wishes to be a partaker of the blessings of the covenant.⁷⁶

Secondly, Owen insists that the process of the believer’s sanctification can be increased

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1: 441.

⁷⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Vol. 2), 703.

by his diligent attendance on the means of grace. Although he points out that ordinarily the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification progresses in the life of the believer, Owen acknowledges that this principle is open to exceptions:

Although there is no grace nor degree of grace or holiness in believers but what is wrought in them (believers) by the Holy Spirit of God, yet, ordinarily and regularly, the increase and growth of grace, and their thriving in holiness and righteousness, depend upon the use and improvement of grace received, in a diligent attendance unto all those duties of obedience which are required of us, 2 Pet, i. 5-7. And methinks it is the most unreasonable and sottish thing in the world, for a man to be slothful and negligent in attending unto those duties which God requireth of him, which all his spiritual growth depends upon, which the eternal welfare of his soul is concerned in, on pretence of the efficacious aids of the Spirit, without which he can do nothing, and which he neither hath nor can have whilst he doth nothing.⁷⁷

From Owen's concern, a corollary of his position is that grace and duty are not opposite, but complementary and interdependent in the process of sanctification.

In carrying on mortification of sin in the progressive process of sanctification, the believer's duties involve not only "the improvement and practice of the principle of

⁷⁷ Owen, *Works*, 3: 204-205.

God's grace," but also "the weakening, impairing, and destroying of the contrary principle of sin in its root and fruits."⁷⁸ In his treatise, *The Dominion of Sin and Grace* (1668), in which he discussed the nature and character of sin's dominion and how it is broken in the believer, Owen further develops this concept:

But the assurance here given is built on other considerations; whereof the first is, that the gospel is the means ordained and instrument used by God for the communication of spiritual strength unto them that believe, for the dethroning of sin. It is the 'power of God unto salvation,' Rom. I. 16, that whereby and wherein he puts forth his power unto that end. And sin must be really dethroned by the powerful acting of grace in us, and that in a way of duty in ourselves. We are absolved, quitted, free from the rule of the sin, as unto its pretended right and title, by the promise of the gospel; for thereby are free and discharged from the rule of the law, wherein all the title of sin unto dominion is founded, for "the strength of sin is the law:" but we are freed from it, as unto its internal power and strength in its due exercise. Now, this is communicated by the gospel; it gives life and power, with such continual supplies of grace as are able to dethrone sin, and for ever to prohibit its return.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 538.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7: 546.

Owen's last counter-argument to the Antinomians in the imputative strain is that God's commands require the believer's obedience:

The command of God is the measure and rule of our industry and diligence in a way of duty; and why any one should be discouraged from the exercise of that industry which God requires of him by the consideration of aid and assistance which he hath promised unto him, I cannot understand. The work of obedience is difficult and of the highest importance; so that if any one can be negligent therein because God will help and assist him, it is because he hates it, he likes it not. Let others do what they please, I shall endeavour to comply with the apostle's advice upon the enforcement which he gives unto it: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.'⁸⁰

To sum up, against Arminianism, Owen is anxious to preserve the fact that whereas unregenerate man must be characterised by corruption of the mind, depravity of the will and affections (impotency and stubbornness), and spiritual death extending to the whole soul, the saint is characterized by a new internal principle of grace to reflect the holiness of God. And by Owen's insisting both on the old refrain of natural human impotency, and on union with Christ to overthrow the dominion of sin we see how the debate with

⁸⁰ Ibid., 3: 10.

Arminian theology involved not simply bold questions about the metaphysics of the God-creature relationship, but also pushed him back to reflecting upon the Trinitarian nature and acts of God himself. For Owen, the author of the saint's sanctification is the Triune God- Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. That is, Owen relates the work of the Holy Spirit to that of the Son. Sanctification is the work of God by the Holy Spirit, and the foundation for this work was laid by Jesus Christ.

At the same time, Owen sees a delicate balance between the efficacious works of God's sanctifying grace and the need for human duty. The grace of God and human endeavour in sanctification must be viewed as complementary rather than contradictory.

Therefore, it should be borne in mind that, according to Owen, although the saint's accomplishment of holiness depends on God's grace, there are some things required of him to this end, that holiness may be carried on in him and that he give all diligence to the increase of this grace.

1.2 Covenantal Interpretation: Union with Christ

When we observe Owen's whole theology, and in particular his view of sanctification, it is clear that he organised his ideas on the principle of a covenant theology, popular

among his contemporaries. This concept is to be found throughout his works.⁸¹

At this point Owen's federal reading of Scripture reflected not just the shape of the Biblical material, but also elements within contemporary society. As much as the covenant concept can be advanced as a valid theological system in itself, it is important not to underestimate the historical context in which it was developed. Nevertheless, it is not our purpose to examine this history in any real depth, but only inasmuch as it relates to Owen's own thoughts.

Concerning Owen's viewpoint it is important to note that:

Though there be sundry persons in covenant, yet there is but one undertaker on all hands, and that is God himself. It doth not depend upon the will of another, but of him only who is faithful, who cannot lie, who cannot deceive, who will make all his engagements good to the utmost. He is an all-sufficient one; "he will work, and who shall let him?" "The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?" Yea, he is an unchangeable one; what he undertakes shall come to

⁸¹ See David Wai-Sing Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen"; Jonathan Jong-Chun Won, "Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans", 264-291.

pass.⁸²

Here, for Owen, the divine covenants are unilateral in origin, but are also “attended with promises and threats related to man’s faithfulness or disobedience.”⁸³ As he writes in *An*

Exposition upon Psalm CXXX (1668):

a covenant between God and man is a thing great and marvellous, whether we consider the nature of it or the ends of it. In its own nature it is a convention, compact, and agreement for some certain ends and purposes between the holy Creator and his poor creatures... God in a covenant gives those holy properties of his nature unto his creature, as his hand or arm for him to lay hold upon, and by them to plead and argue with him. And without this man could have no foundation for any intercourse or communion with God, or of any expectation from him, nor any direction how to deal with him in any of his concerns. Great and signal, then, was the condescension of God, to take his poor creature into covenant with himself; and especially will this be manifest if we consider the ends of it, and why it is that God thus deals with man. Now, these are no other than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him;-all unto his glory. These are the ends of every covenant that God takes us into

⁸² Owen, *Works*, 11: 210.

⁸³ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 21; Owen, *Works*, 5: 275.

with himself... No more is required of us in a way of duty, no more can be required by us to make us blessed and happy, but what is contained in them. That we might live to God, be accepted with him, and come to the eternal fruition of him, is the whole of man, all that we were made for or are capable of; and these are the ends of every covenant that God makes with men, being all comprised in that solemn word, that "he will be their God, and they shall be his people."⁸⁴

1.2.1 The Three Covenants

With respect to the mutual covenant, Owen holds that there are only two covenants between God and man:

There were never absolutely any more than two covenants; wherein all persons indefinitely are concerned. The first was the covenant of works, made with Adam, and with all in him. And what he did as the head of that covenant, as our representative therein, is imputed unto us, as if we had done it, Rom. v.12. The other is that of grace, made originally with Christ, and through him with all the elect. And here lie the life and hope of our souls, - that what Christ did as the head of that covenant, as our representative, is all imputed unto us for righteousness and salvation.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Owen, *Works*, 6: 470-471.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 22: 391 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 21:391).

Owen goes on to define how the Covenant of Works subsists as follows:

The whole entire nature of the covenant of works consisted in this, - *that upon our personal obedience, according unto the law and rule of it, we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him.* Herein the essence of it did consist; and whatever covenant proceedeth on these terms, or hath the nature of them in it, however it may be varied with additions or alterations, is the same covenant still, and not another. As in the renovation of the promise wherein the essence of the covenant of grace was contained, God did oftentimes make other additions unto it (as unto Abraham and David), yet was it still the same covenant for the substance of it, and not another; so whatever variations may be made in, or additions unto, the dispensation of the first covenant, so long as this rule is retained, “Do this, and live,” it is still the same covenant for the substance and essence of it.⁸⁶

It should be noted that, for Owen, every covenant must be founded on, and resolved into God’s promise. For that reason, Owen maintains “there is infinite grace in every divine covenant, inasmuch as it is established on promises. - Infinite condescension it is in God, that he will enter into covenant with dust and ashes, with poor worms of the earth”.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5: 275-276. “Italics His”

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23: 68 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 22:68).

However, even though “the reward of eternal life far exceeded strict justice in the covenant of works, for the very reason that the reward is a matter of promise”,⁸⁸ yet “there was no provision for the *pardon of sin*, no room or place for forgiveness in it; but on supposition that man sinned, he was in that covenant left remediless”.⁸⁹ That is to say, “there was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant; but there was no order taken about sin; so that if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more”.⁹⁰

Owen, therefore, stresses the necessity of the Covenant of Grace:

But this covenant of grace hath taken order about sin; that there shall no sin befall believers but what the grace of the covenant will extend pardon unto. If a believer should fall into any one sin that would deprive him of the benefit of this covenant, it would not be “ordered in all things.” There are sins that, if a believer should fall into, would break the covenant; but the covenant prevents such falls.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 23.

⁸⁹ Owen, *Works*, 6: 474. “Italics His”

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9:419.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The covenant of grace is not made with Adam, or any man, but through a Mediator.

“After the fall, he entered into another covenant with mankind, which, from the principle, nature, and end of it, is commonly called the *covenant of grace*.”⁹² Thus, the covenant of grace was “established, ratified, and confirmed in and by the death of Christ ; that was the testament whercof he was the testator, which was ratified in his death, and whence his blood is called ‘the blood of the new testament,’ Matt. xxvi. 28.”⁹³

In this sense, Owen argues that, “the covenant of grace could not be *procured* by any means or cause but that which was the *cause* of this covenant of the mediator, or God the Father with the Son, as undertaking the work of mediation”.⁹⁴

Here, it should also be noted that Owen makes an important distinction between the covenant of grace made between God and men concerning Christ, and the covenant of redemption made between the Father and the Son for men.⁹⁵ Indeed, “the covenant of grace *depends* upon the covenant of redemption as its foundation, and for its saving

⁹² Ibid., 19:78 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18:78). “Italics His”

⁹³ Ibid., 10: 236.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 5:191. “Italics His”

⁹⁵ Ibid., 19:78 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18:78).

power".⁹⁶

Owen elaborates at length on what makes the covenant of redemption. It must involve distinct persons; it must be a voluntary arrangement; it must deal with matters within the power of covenanting parties; and it must dispose matters to their mutual satisfaction.⁹⁷

Not content with resting salvation upon the compact between man and God, Owen is soon reinforcing the justice, the rationality, and the permanence of the covenant of grace with the hypothesis of another and previous covenant between the Father and his Son, so that he made God not merely bound by His pledge to the creature, but still more firmly tied by a covenant with Himself. Thus, according to Owen, the covenant of redemption made clear that the link between God's grace and human redemption was to be found in Christ.

A significant part of the covenant of redemption concerned the assumption, by the Son, of human nature. This common nature, shared by Christ and the elect, provides the foundation of the union between Christ and believers.⁹⁸ The Son, as to his nature, was

⁹⁶ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 27. "Italics His"

⁹⁷ Owen, *Works*, 19: 82-83 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18:82-83).

⁹⁸ Ibid, 5: 179.

then predestined to “grace and glory”.⁹⁹ The grace and glory of the personal union of natures in the incarnation was obviously peculiar to Christ alone, but all the spiritual blessing was then, in due course, “to be communicated by and through him, unto the church.”¹⁰⁰

From this piece of *a priori* reasoning, Owen argues a relationship between union with Christ and the covenant of redemption:

The first spring or cause of this *union* (between Christ and believers), and of all the other causes of it, lieth in that *eternal compact* that was between the Father and the Son concerning the recovery and salvation of fallen mankind.¹⁰¹

Here, Owen seems to consider that the climactic realization of the covenantal bond between the triune God and believers is union with Christ, not least because “in his incarnation he took our nature into a mystical union with his own; so herein he takes our persons into a mystical union with himself”¹⁰² according to the condition stipulated in the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 180.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 179. “Italics His”

¹⁰² Ibid., 1: 365.

covenant of redemption that the eternal Son assume human nature and be made flesh.

The reason for this assumption of human nature by the Son, according to Owen, is that the work of redemption “must be *wrought in our own nature*- in the nature that had sinned, and which was to be restored and brought unto glory.”¹⁰³ Owen goes on to state that:

On supposition, I say, of the salvation of our nature, no satisfaction can be made unto the glory of God for the sin of that nature, but in the nature itself that sinned and is to be saved. For whereas God gave the law unto man as an effect of his wisdom and holiness, which he transgressed in his disobedience, wherein could the glory of them or either of them be exalted, if the same law were complied withal and fulfilled in and by a nature of another kind- suppose that of angels? For, notwithstanding any such obedience, yet the law might be unsuited unto the nature of man, whereunto it was originally prescribed. Wherefore, there would be a veil drawn over the glory of God in *giving the law* unto man, if it were not fulfilled by obedience in the *same nature*; nor can there be any such relation between the obedience and sufferings of one nature in the stead and for the disobedience of another, as that glory might ensue unto the wisdom, holiness, and justice of God, in the deliverance of that other nature thereon. The Scripture abounds in the declaration of the necessity

¹⁰³ Ibid., 197. “Italics His”

hereof, with its condecency unto divine wisdom. Speaking of the way of our relief and recovery, ‘verily,’ saith the apostle, ‘he took not on him the nature of angels,’ Heb.ii.16. Had it been the recovery of angels which he designed, he would have taken their nature on him. But this would have been no relief at all unto us, no more than the assuming of our nature is of advantage unto the fallen angels. The obedience and sufferings of Christ therein extended not at all unto them-nor was it just or equal that they should be relieved thereby. What, then, was required unto our deliverance? Why, saith he, ‘Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same’, verse 14. It was human nature (here expressed by flesh and blood) that was to be delivered; and therefore it was human nature wherein this deliverance was to be wrought.¹⁰⁴

That is, since sin, misery and death had ravaged the human race, only a human being could atone for the sins of humanity. Without the Christ’s manhood redemption was impossible. Only another Adam could undo the damage the first Adam had done.

1.2.2 The Two Unions

But for Owen there was a further reason for the Son’s assumption of human nature: the need for him to be related to “the common stock of our nature.” This follows from his

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 197-198. “Italics His”

sharing flesh and blood, experiencing human life from embryo through infancy and childhood to maturity:

That part of human nature wherein or whereby this work was to be effected, as unto the essence or substance of it, was to be *derived from the common root* or stock of the same nature, in our first parents. It would not suffice hereunto that God should create a man, out of the dust of earth or out of nothing, of the same nature in general with ourselves; for there would be no cognation or alliance between him and us, so that we should be any way concerned in what he did or suffered: for this alliance depends solely hereon, that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men,' Act xvii. 26. Hence it is that the genealogy of Christ is given us in the Gospel- not only from Abraham, to declare the faithfulness of God in the promise that he should be of his seed, but from Adam also, to manifest his relation unto the common stock of our nature, and unto all mankind therein. The first discovery of the wisdom of God herein was in that primitive relation, that the Deliverer should be of 'the seed of the woman,' Gen. iii. 15. No other but he who was so could 'break the serpent's head,' or 'destroy the work of the devil,' so as that we might be delivered and restored. He was not only to be partaker of the nature, but he was so to be, by being 'the seed of the woman,' Gal. iv 4. He was not to be created out of nothing, nor to be made of the dust of the earth, but so 'made of a woman,' as that thereby he might receive our nature from the common root and spring of it. Thus 'he who

sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all one,' Heb. ii.11... of the same mass, of one nature and blood; whence he is not ashamed to call them brethren. This also was to be brought forth from the treasures of infinite wisdom.¹⁰⁵

From the perspective of Owen's approach to the incarnation, it is clear that he places this union between Christ and believers within the framework of federalism. In other words, the union with Christ is one of the processes of accomplishing the covenant of redemption.

There is, however, another union between Christ and believers: the spiritual

as in his incarnation he took upon him our flesh and blood by the work of the Spirit, so in our regeneration he bestoweth on us his flesh and blood by the operation of the same Spirit. Yea, so strict is this latter union which we have with Christ, that as the former is truly said to be a union of two natures into one person, so this of many persons into one nature; for by it we are 'made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Pet, i. 4, becoming 'members of his body, of his flesh, and of bones,' Eph. v. 30. We are so parts of him, of his mystical body, that we and he become thereby, as it were, one Christ. 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one

¹⁰⁵

Ibid., 198-199.

body: so also in Christ,' 1 Cor.xii.12. And the ground of this is, because the same Spirit is in him and us. In him, indeed, dwelleth the *fullness* of it, when it is bestowed upon us only by *measure*; but yet it is still the *same* Spirit... Now, though Christ for the present, in respect of our nature assumed, be never so far remote and distant from us in heaven, yet, by the effectual energy and inhabitation of the same Spirit, he is still the head of one body whereof we are members, still but one with us.¹⁰⁶

Hence, believers are also united with Christ by the same Spirit dwelling in him and them:

I say, then, this is that which gives us union with Christ, and that wherein it consists, even that the one and self-same Spirit dwells in him and us. The first saving illapse from God upon the hearts of the elect is the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁷

As Ferguson has observed, “the Holy Spirit who is the substance of the promise of the covenant, is given, as it were, from the heart of the covenant of redemption.”¹⁰⁸ “Christ received the promised Spirit for his church in his ascension; the Spirit receives from

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 13: 22. “Italics His”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 11:337.

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 33.

Christ, and what he receives is communicated to the believer".¹⁰⁹ This is also reflected in A30 of the Shorter Catechism: "The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling".¹¹⁰ For Owen, the argument that the same Spirit that dwells within Christ dwells within all believers is a key point to understanding their union with Christ.¹¹¹

It is worth noting at this point that Owen's idea of the mystical union of Christ with all believers (set within his federal framework) was the predominant principle for sanctification within the Reformed Orthodox mainstream. The significance of union with Christ is seen in Puritan writings throughout this period, from William Perkins in 1595 to John Bunyan in the late 1600's.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Acts 2.33; Owen, *Works*, 3: 516 cited from Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 33.

¹¹⁰ *The Confession of Faith – The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs* (U.S.A: Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1990), 11.

¹¹¹ Owen, *Works*, 11: 336.

¹¹² William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (1616) I, 637 cited from R. T. Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety", 187; John Bunyan, *The Works of*

And although the expression, 'union with Christ', does not occur in the Bible, it fairly describes the central reality in salvation (including sanctification) in the New Testament.

1.2.3 Definitive Sanctification

The most meticulously logical development of the idea of union with Christ appears in Romans 6: 1-14. In this text, the union with Christ is related to dying to sin first. Through this death the sinful nature became powerless on account of the fact that the old Man, with the sinful nature prior to regeneration, was crucified at the cross. Christ died once, and the old nature of the saint, simultaneously, was buried with him. Accordingly,

John Bunyan (Vol.1), 36. See also William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 157, 160; Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 146; David Clarkson, *The Works of David Clarkson* (Vol.1), 347-348; Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere convert and The Sound Believer*, 168-170; Walter Marshall, *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, 33-45; Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter: with A Life of The Author; and A Critical Examination of His Writings*(Vol.7), 193-194 cited from Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 105; Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*(Vol.2), 246 cited from Steve Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: The Problem of sin in the writings of John Owen Christian*, 219; John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel*(Vol.2), 33-49.

the believer does not let sin reign in his body so that he obeys its evil desires (Verse 12).¹¹³

Richard B. Gaffin mentions that sanctification is defined clearly as related to the resurrection.¹¹⁴ The believers, therefore, are directed to present (παριστάνετε) themselves to God as those alive from the dead (Rom. 6:13). This points to an isolation from the past and a demand for a new life. The aorist tense indicates the once-for-allness of the dedication involved in the saint's body.

Thus, Paul has just been expounding the fact that those who are united to Christ in his death and resurrection are delivered from the enslaving power of sin. Union with Christ destroys union with sin. Believers experience the power of victory from the union with Christ when the dominion of sin over them is irreversibly destroyed. The phenomenon has been described as *definitive sanctification* by John Murray:

¹¹³ See David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, 93-103; Ferguson, "The Reformed view," in *Christian Spirituality- Five Views of Sanctification*, 52-60; Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 144-152; Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 72-82; Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 106-107. See also James Fraser, *A Treatise on Sanctification*, 1-106.

¹¹⁴ Richard. B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 125.

We are compelled to reach the conclusion that it is by virtue of our having died with Christ, and our being raised with him in his resurrection from the dead, that the decisive breach with sin in power, control and defilement has been wrought, and that the reason for this is that Christ in his death and resurrection broke the power of sin, triumphed over the god of this world, the prince of darkness, executed judgment upon the world and its ruler, and by that victory delivered all those who were united to him from the power of darkness, and translated them into his own kingdom. So intimate is the union between Christ and his people, that they were partakers with him in all these triumphal achievements, and therefore died to sin, rose with Christ in the power of his resurrection, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. As the death and resurrection are central in the whole process of redemptive accomplishment, so are they central in that by which sanctification itself is wrought in the hearts and lives of God's people.¹¹⁵

In a similar manner, Owen defines the dominion of sin as not only an "unjust and usurped sovereignty", but also "evil and perverse".¹¹⁶ The reasons for this are that "sin

¹¹⁵ John Murray, "The Agency in Definitive Sanctification," in *Collected Writing of John Murray* (Vol.2), 289.

¹¹⁶ Owen, *Works*, 7: 509.

hath no *right* to rule in the souls of men and men have no power to give sin a right to rule over them,¹¹⁷ and sin is “always used and exercised unto *ill ends*, unto the hurt and ruin of them over whom it is”.¹¹⁸ Thus, men have no ability to throw away the dominion of sin by themselves.

However, Owen argues:

(Christ) it is alone who came to, and can, destroy this work of the devil. The dominion of sin is the complement of the works of the devil, where all his designs centre. This ‘the Son of God was manifested to destroy.’ He alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is acted in the rule of sin. Wherefore, hereunto our assurance of this comfortable truth is principally resolved. And what Christ hath done, and doth, for this end, is a great part of the subject of gospel revelation. The like may be spoken of the communication of the Holy Spirit, which is the only principal efficient cause of the ruin of the dominion of sin; for ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’, and nowhere else.¹¹⁹

As this point, Owen seems to be saying that those who are regenerated have the power

¹¹⁷ Ibid. “*Italics His*”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 512. “*Italics His*”

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 551.

by the grace of the gospel to overthrow the dominion of sin by their actual implanting into Christ's mystical body by the work of the Holy Spirit. As Owen writes:

By him (the Holy Spirit) are we *united* unto Christ; - that is, his person, and not a *light* within us, as some think; nor the *doctrine of the gospel*, as others with an equal folly seem to imagine. It is by the doctrine and grace of the gospel that we are united, but it is the person of Christ whereunto we are united; for 'he that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit,' 1 Cor. vi. 17, because by that one Spirit he is joined unto him; for 'by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body,' chap. xii. 13, - implanted into the body, and united unto the head. And therefore, 'If we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his,' Rom.viii.9. We are therefore his, - that is, united unto him, - by a participation of the Spirit. And hereby Christ himself is in us; for 'Jesus Christ is in us, except we be reprobates,' 2 Cor. xiii. 5; - that is, he is in us 'by his Spirit that dwelleth in us,' Rom. viii. 9, 11; 1 Cor. vi.19... It is denied that, on this supposition, the Lord Christ doth *unite impure or ungodly sinners* unto himself, so as that they should be so united, and continue impure and ungodly: for in the *same instant* wherein any one is united unto Christ, and by the *same act* whereby he is so united, he is *really and habitually purified and sanctified*; for where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty, and purity, and holiness. All acts and duties of holiness are in order of nature consequential hereunto, but the person is quickened, purified,

and sanctified in its union.¹²⁰

So, although emphasizing mainly the progressive, gradual transformation and conformation in believer's lives rather than the once-for-all, decisive element in sanctification, Owen does not ignore the definitive victory that was accomplished by Christ and given to believers in their union with Christ.

1.2.4 Progressive Sanctification

It is no surprise that in Owen's perspective the heart of the application of salvation, underlying all further consideration of *ordo salutis* questions, is the saint's union with Christ by Spirit-worked faith. The reason is that the saint's union with Christ is the ground of the actual imputation of his righteousness, and through this principle adoption, justification, sanctification, perseverance, resurrection and glory are communicated unto him.¹²¹ In this sense, Owen stresses that God communicates his grace to his people continually through the union with Christ within the context of progressive sanctification.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3: 516-518. "Italics His"

¹²¹ Owen, *Works*, 21: 149-151 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20:149-151).

¹²² Ibid., 3: 414.

Union with Christ “is the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations”.¹²³

What is particularly interesting about Owen’s discussion of the spiritual enjoyments and expectations in the union between Christ and his people is the way in which he makes a clear connection between two distinct sides and two distinct dimensions within progressive sanctification.

The two dimensions have been expressed as God’s grace and human duty,¹²⁴ which have been explained already. The two sides refer to sanctification both negatively and positively considered. The former contains the purging of sin.¹²⁵ The latter is involved in restoration of the image of God.¹²⁶

To summarize, according to Owen the union of Christ with his people is an effectual application of the covenant of redemption within the covenant of grace. And there is a

¹²³ Ibid., 21: 146 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 146).

¹²⁴ Ibid., 3: 527-565.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 422-467.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 468-527.

twofold union, taking place by Christ taking on human nature and by bestowing on them his Spirit. Besides, the union between Christ and his people is crucial to understanding Owen's teaching on definitive sanctification. Furthermore, all believers' union with Christ is part of the process of accomplishing their sanctification as the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations.

1.3 Anthropocentric Interpretation: a Conflict with Sin

Although Owen himself does not always mention an explicit relationship between sin and the image of God in human beings, the conflict with sin in all believers through sanctification is nothing less than the restoration of the image of God.¹²⁷

1.3.1 The Image of God

Interestingly, Owen makes a distinction between image and likeness, although occasionally they appear complementary. Concerning likeness, Owen seems to frame his discussion more in terms of righteousness.¹²⁸ In this sense, "original righteousness is

¹²⁷ Ibid., 369, 386.

¹²⁸ Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 37-64.

shorthand for right relations between God and humanity before the fall”¹²⁹:

Hitherto we have thought that the original righteousness wherein Adam was created had comprehended the integrity and perfection of the whole man; not only that whereby the body was obedient unto the soul, and all the affections subservient to the rule of reason for the performance of all natural actions, but also a light, uprightness, and holiness of grace in the mind and will, whereby he was enabled to yield obedience unto God for the attaining of that supernatural end whereunto he was created.¹³⁰

Furthermore, writing against the Father of English Socinianism, John Biddle, Owen carefully argues that “likeness to God is not a reference to a bodily shape, but points to a kind of resemblance unto that holiness and righteousness which are in Him, Eph. iv. 23, 24, etc.”¹³¹ At this point, Owen says, “by the entrance of sin, this image of God, so far as it was our righteousness and holiness before him, was utterly defaced and lost”.¹³²

In the meantime, for Owen, the image has been described as human faculties that make

¹²⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹³⁰ Owen, *Works*, 10: 84.

¹³¹ Ibid., 12: 100.

¹³² Ibid., 3: 418

relations between God and humanity possible. In this way, Owen states that “they (unregenerate men) have the *subject* of knowledge, a natural faculty of understanding. Their minds remain; though depraved, destroyed, perverted, yea, so far that ‘their eye and the light that is in them is darkness,’ yet the faculty remains still, Matt. vi. 23.”¹³³

The argument is that the faculties which allowed the original communion to occur between God and humanity remain. That is, as a result of fall, the image has not been obliterated, but ruined. As he notes:

our nature lost its pre-eminence, and we were reduced into order amongst perishing beasts; for notwithstanding some feeble relics of this image yet abiding with us, we have really, with respect unto our proper end, in our lapsed condition, more of the bestial nature in us than of the divine. Wherefore, the restoration of this image in us by the grace of Jesus Christ Eph. iv.24, Col. iii. 10, is the recovery of that pre-eminence and privilege of our nature which we had foolishly lost.¹³⁴

A similar argument has been also noted from Heinrich Heppes *Reformed Dogmatics*:

We assert that the principal part of the divine image, namely, original

¹³³ Ibid., 11: 343. “Italics His”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3: 580.

righteousness, was plainly lost and abolished through the fall and sin of origin. Meanwhile we deny that the entire image of God in all its parts was utterly lost and abolished, which those will easily concede who recognise part of the divine image in the rational soul as an immortal spirit endowed with thought and will. By the fall man did not cease to be man, although he did cease to be righteous.¹³⁵

In this way, vestiges of the image remain (i.e., humans retain their faculties), yet the likeness is destroyed in that human persons were designed relationally, and this was disrupted as humanity turned from God to themselves.¹³⁶

So by retaining the faculties that make relations possible, Owen seems to preserve some element of ontological continuity between pre-fall and fallen humanity.

1.3.2 The Nature of Sin and Its Effect

Here, one further question now arises, What then is sin in Owen's theology? He links to

God's law. As he notes:

¹³⁵ Marcus Fridericus Wendelinus, *Collatio Doctrinae Christianae Reformatorum et Lutheranorum*, 125 cited from Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 313.

¹³⁶ Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 37-64.

Sin is either original or actual. Original sin is the habitual inconformity of our natures unto the holiness of God expressed in the law of creation. Actual sin is our inconformity to God and his holiness expressed in the particular commands of the law. The nature of all sin, therefore, consists in its enmity, its inconformity to the rule.¹³⁷

Owen goes on to give two reasons for the link between sin and the law:

(1.) As it expressed the *authority* of God in its precepts and sanction. Hence guilt inseparably follows every sin, which is the respect it induceth on the sinner unto the law, upon the account of the authority of the Lawgiver. The act of sin passeth away, but this guilt abideth on the person, must do so, until the law be satisfied, and the sinner thereon absolved. This naturally produceth fear, which is the first expression of a sense of guilt. So Adam expressed it upon his sin: 'I heard thy voice, and I was afraid,' Gen. iii.10.

(2.) The law may be considered as it expresseth the *holiness* of God and his truth; which it was necessary, from the nature of God, that it should do. Hence there is in sin a peculiar inconformity to the holiness of God; which is the "macula", the "spot", "stain", and "filth" of it; which are inseparable from it whilst God is holy, unless it be purged and done away... And this is inseparably attended with shame; which

¹³⁷

Owen, *Works*, 3: 427.

is the expression of a sense of this filth of sin. So Adam upon his sin had his eyes open to see his nakedness, and was filled with shame. This is the order of these things: - God, who is the object of our obedience and sin, is considered as the supreme lawgiver. On his law he hath impressed his authority and his holiness.¹³⁸

Owen sums up this idea in the phrase that “Man’s disability to live to God in their sin”.¹³⁹ As Steve Griffiths has noted, this disability is outlined in three points:

From what hath been discoursed, we may discover the nature of this spiritual death, under the power whereof all unregenerate persons do abide: for there are three things in it: 1. A *privation* of a principle of spiritual life enabling us to live unto God; 2. A *negation* of all spiritual, vital acts,- that is, of all acts and duties of holy obedience, acceptable unto God, and tending to the enjoyment of him; 3. A total *defect* and want of *power* for any such acts whatever.¹⁴⁰

However, prior to the fall, Adam’s state was as follows:

¹³⁸ Ibid., 428. “Italics His”

¹³⁹ Ibid., 290.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 287. “Italics His” cited from Griffiths, *Redeem The Time- Sin in the Writings of John Owen*, 45.

In this life, as in life in general, three things are to be considered: ... (1.) There was a *quickening principle* belonging unto it; for every life is an act of a quickening principle. This in Adam was the image of God, or a habitual conformity unto God, his mind and will, wherein the holiness and righteousness of God himself was represented, Gen. 1. 26, 27... This gave him a habitual disposition unto all duties of that obedience that was required of him; it was the rectitude of all the faculties of his soul with respect unto his supernatural end, Eccles. vii. 29. (2) There belonged unto it *continual actings* from, or by virtue of, and suitable unto, this principle. All the acts of Adam's life should have been subordinate unto his great moral end. In all that he did he should have lived unto God, according unto the law of that covenant wherein he walked before him. And an acting in all things suitably unto the light in his mind, unto the righteousness and holiness in his will and affections, that uprightness, or integrity, or order, that was in his soul, was his living unto God.(3) He had herewithal *power* or *ability* to continue the principle of life in suitable acts of it, with respect unto the whole obedience required of him; that is, he had a sufficiency of *ability* for the performance of any duty, or of all, that the covenant required.¹⁴¹

Thus, central to Owen's argument is the fact that sin is defection from God, which is the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 285. "Italics His"

result of a privation, so that disease and death are from this privation. This makes clear that for Owen, sin must be viewed as a privation or, specifically, a privation of good made by free choice according to the liberty of man's nature. In this connection, Muller has commented that:

a further distinction can be made between *privatio pura*, pure or complete privation, and *privatio non pura*, incomplete privation. The former is a privation of existence (*esse*), i.e., an absolute privation; the latter is a partial privation, or partial loss, a damage caused to the subject. Sin must fall into the latter category since it is only a partial privation of the good; it does not abolish the human will but consists in defective willing.¹⁴²

Thus, as Heppe has stated, owing to the *privatio non pura* where there is the habit to all evil, which is contrary and inimical to holiness and righteousness, "it is not a mere *privatio*, but also simultaneously an active quality opposed to the good, an *actuosa privatio* or *vitiositas*, the absolute opposite of righteousness".¹⁴³

Owen shares this view of sin as an activated, positive and efficacious force:

¹⁴² Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms-Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 246. "Italics His"

¹⁴³ Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 323. "Italics His"

the corrupt principle of sin, the native habitual inclination that is us unto evil, worketh early in our natures, and for the most part preventeth all the actings of grace in us... As men grow up in the state of nature, sin gets ground in them and upon them, *subjectively* and *objectively*. Concupiscence gets strength with age, and grows in violence as persons arrive to ability for its exercise; the instruments of it, in the faculties of the soul, organs of the senses, and members of the body, growing every day more serviceable unto it, and more apt to receive impressions from it or to comply with its motions. Hence some charge the sins of youth on the heat of blood and the restlessness of the animal spirits, which prompt men unto irregularities and extravagancies; - but these are only *vehicular concupiscentiae*, things which it makes use of to exert its poison by; for sin turns everythings in this state unto its own advantage, and abuseth 'the commandments' itself, to 'work in us all manner of concupiscence,' Rom. vii.8. Again, the objects of lust, by the occasions of life, are now multiplied. Temptations increase with years and the businesses of the world, but especially by that corruption of conversation which is among the most. Hence sundry persons are in this part of their youth, one way or other, overtaken with some gross actual sin or sins.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Owen, *Works*, 3: 338, 341-342. "Italics His"

Owen's description of sin as both privation and positive force leads to his emphasis on God's grace as sovereign and effectual:

We do conclude that the mind in the state of nature is so depraved, vitiated, and corrupted, that it is not able, upon the proposal of spiritual things unto it in the dispensation and preaching of the gospel, to understand, receive, and embrace them in a spiritual and saving manner, so as to have the *sanctifying power* of them thereby brought into and fixed in the soul, without an internal, especial, immediate, supernatural, effectual, enlightening act of the Holy Ghost.¹⁴⁵

Owen is here setting out God's sovereign and effectual grace; it is noticeable that the faculties of each believer change when grace and holiness are "infused" into the elect.¹⁴⁶ Answer seventy-seven of the Larger Catechism from the Westminster Assembly makes this point: "God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof."

1.3.3 Vivification and Mortification

Once renewed by the infusion through the Holy Spirit, the faculties are able to respond

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 281-282. "Italics His"

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 220, 4: 437, 5: 64, 11: 97-98.

to God. This response allows the more comprehensive reality that is central to Christian existence- namely, communion with God. Furthermore, Owen seems to believe that through mutual relationship in dynamic equilibrium between a believer's response and God's grace, the believer has the privilege of renewing God's image.¹⁴⁷

However, it is an axiom for Owen that,

There are yet in them inclinations and dispositions to sin, proceeding from the *remainders* of a contrary habitual principle. This the Scripture calls the 'flesh', 'lust', the 'sin that dwelleth in us', the 'body of death;' being what yet remaineth in believers of that vicious, corrupted depravation of our nature, which came upon us by the loss of the image of God, disposing the whole soul unto all that is evil. This yet continueth in them, inclining them unto evil and all that is so, according to the power and efficacy that is remaining unto it in various degrees... There are in the same mind, will, and affections, namely, of a person regenerate, contrary habits and inclinations, continually opposing one another, and acting adversely about the same objects and ends.¹⁴⁸

Here, what we must not miss is that for Owen, although sin is dethroned in the life of a believer, the presence of sin remains as a ferociously powerful foe. All believers

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 3: 493-506, 566-591, 1: 285-415, See also 2(Vol).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 488. "Italics His"

experience a conflict between contrary habits and inclinations in the same mind. Owen's pastoral concern with regard to sin as active and powerful is reflected in his several treatises, such as *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), *Of Temptation*(1658), *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of The Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*(1668), and *On the Dominion of Sin and Grace*(1688) .

In these treatises, Owen observes the nature of sin from personal experience and in highly experiential terminology. Indeed, he almost personified sin, stating it as a force and deceit.

Basically, the force is described as a law inbred in the believer, because sin seeks an operative principle that moves and inclines constantly unto action.¹⁴⁹ Its chief characteristic is power and efficacy for where there is a law there is power.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, as internal law, it has power to dispense rewards and punishments that gain strength through the commission of sin, easily manipulates the saint's faculties, and expresses its hatred of God by refusing to accommodate grace.¹⁵¹ According to Owen, one of the most significant advantages that the law of sin retains is that it makes its home

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 6: 157-169.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 169-176.

in the human heart, that is, in the whole soul of a person and in all of their faculties: not the mind, not the affection, not the will, but all is secured, and when grace hath made its entrance, yet sin will dwell in all its coasts.¹⁵² This is the foundation of sin's power, the fact that it is not an outward, written, commanding, directing law, but an inbred, working, impelling, and urging law: "sin's strength in the heart lies in its unsearchable nature- there is always more there than can be discovered; it lies too in the deceitfulness of man's heart which is full of contradictions."¹⁵³

The fundamental point is that for Owen,

(Sin) always *abides* in the soul...There is its constant residence and habitation. If it came upon the soul only at certain seasons, much obedience might be perfectly accomplished in its absence; yea, and as they deal with usurping tyrants, whom they intend to thrust out of a city, the gates might be sometimes shut against it, that it might not return,- the soul might fortify itself against it. But the soul is its home; there it dwells, and is no wanderer. Wherever you are, whatever you are about, this law of sin is always in you; in the best that you do, and in the worst... there is a living coal continually in their houses; which, if it be not looked unto, will

¹⁵² Ibid., 176-181.

¹⁵³ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 132; Owen, *Works*, 6: 171.

fire them, and it may be consume them.¹⁵⁴

So, in *The Nature and Causes of Apostasy* (1676), Owen asserts that a policy of appeasement toward sin will result in moral and eternal destruction.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, mortification and a spirit of watchfulness are imperative for all believers.

Owen links his definition of sanctification to the idea of restoring men to the image of God.

*Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant; by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly: – It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Owen, *Works*, 6: 166. “Italics His”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7: 171-172.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 386. “Italics His” See also *ibid.*, 369, 470, 510, 523, 578.

Such a definition is itself linked to the idea that renewal in the image of God only comes through identification with Christ as applied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

one end of his incarnation was, that he might be the representative image of God unto us. Whereas, therefore, in the work of our recovery, the image of God should be restored in us, there was a condecency that it should be done by him who was the essential image of God; for it consists in the communication of the effects and likeness of the same image unto us which was essentially in himself.¹⁵⁷

However, although continual renewal in the image of God in a believer is being progressed by the power of the Holy Spirit, Owen places much weight on the believer's duties, such as mortification of sin.¹⁵⁸ From this, it is not fanciful to think that the renewing of the Christian in his whole being – mind, affection, will – into the image of Christ can be deeply affected by the state of the mutual communion between God and the saint, due to the fact that when the communication is ruptured by sin, the believer's faculties become entangled, and when the communication is renewed, the faculties are

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 1: 218-219.

¹⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 6(Vol), 7(Vol).

positively affected.¹⁵⁹ Hence, as Packer has noted, for Owen, “sanctification is just one facet and cross-section of the more comprehensive reality that is central to Christian existence- namely, communion with God”.¹⁶⁰

Summarizing, although Owen himself does not always mention an explicit relationship between sin and the image of God in human beings, the combat of sin in all believers through sanctification is nothing less than the restoration of the image of God.

Though the image has not been obliterated, but ruined by the entrance of sin, it can only be renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit, because sin (from the concept of privation) caused humans to lose their power and ability to enjoy their relationship with God for eternity.

Having said that the presence of sin remains as a ferociously powerful foe in all believers, although continual renewal in the image of God in a believer is being progressed by the power of the Holy Spirit, yet Owen places much weight on the believer's duties like mortification of sin.

¹⁵⁹ See Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 37-64, 149-205.

¹⁶⁰ Packer, *Among God's Giants- Aspects of Puritan Christianity*, 264.

Through mutual relationship in dynamic equilibrium between a believer's response (due to his renewed faculties) and God's grace (defined as communion with God), they have the privilege of renewing God's image.

1.4 Conclusion

To understand Owen's teaching on sanctification it is essential to consider it within the wider context of his total theological thought. Faced with the fact that Owen's works are not to be viewed as abstract dogmatic treaties, but to be treated in their historical context, Owen's doctrine of sanctification can be interpreted from three different viewpoints: the dialectical interpretation (God's grace and man's duty), the covenantal interpretation (union with Christ), and the anthropocentric interpretation (the combat against sin). All three approaches, as noted above, are prominent in Owen's idea of sanctification.

Owen reflects a fundamentally soteriological concern about the nature of God's relationship to humanity. For Owen it is the practical, pastoral issue of how human sin can be overcome and humanity can again be restored to communion with God that dominates both his doctrine of God and his understanding of humanity. On this point, in

order to trace a coherent and comprehensive structure of the doctrine of sanctification, a better understanding of Owen's teaching on sanctification must be considered on the basis of his Trinitarian theology.

Chapter 2

Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification: Its Trinitarian Structure

The doctrine of the Trinity occupies a crucial position in the exegesis and piety of the Reformed orthodox system.¹⁶¹ Owen also places the doctrine of the Trinity among the fundamental or necessary articles and against both the Socinian denial of the doctrine and the Remonstrant denial of its fundamental nature in Scripture. It is necessary to the right confession of the one God, which is in turn clearly necessary to a right understanding of salvation:

There are some doctrines of the Scripture, some revelations in it, so *sublimely glorious*, of so *profound and mysterious an excellency*, that at the first proposal of them, nature startles, shrinks, and is taken with horror, meeting with that which is above it, too great and too excellent for it, which it could desirously avoid and decline; but yet, gathering itself up to them, it yields, and finds that unless they are accepted and submitted unto, though unsearchable, not only all that hath been received must be rejected, but also the whole dependence of the

¹⁶¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4: The Trinity of God*, 143-157.

creature on God be dissolved, or rendered only dreadful, terrible, and destructive to nature itself. Such are the doctrines of the Trinity...Take away, then, the doctrine of Trinity, and both these are gone; there can be no purpose of grace by the Father in the Son- no covenant for the putting of that purpose in execution: and so the foundation of all fruits of love and goodness is lost to the soul.¹⁶²

In addition, Owen asserts the doctrine of the Trinity as an eminently practical doctrine in his treatise, *Of communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, the Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost unfolded*(1657). In this treatise, Owen argues that the article of the Trinity is not only theological, but also practical, and essential for the faith and worship of the Church. Other Reformed Orthodox theologians such as John Calvin, Herman Witsius, Francis Turretin, Petrus van Mastricht, and Thomas Ridgley¹⁶³ are also unanimous in declaring that the doctrine of the Trinity is not only necessary to salvation, but also an integral part of the faith and piety of the Church. For instance, Turretin states that,

¹⁶² Owen, *Works*, 16: 339-341. "Italics His"

¹⁶³ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4: The Triunity of God*, 154-157.

The article of the Trinity is not only theoretical, but also practical, since it conduces to gratitude and worship of God – to the end that we may devote our faith and service to the Triune God who has revealed himself to us. And [it conduces] to consolation inasmuch as [by it] we may know that Christ has truly redeemed us and that our salvation has been made secure.¹⁶⁴

For Owen, a churchly and practical concern for the doctrine of the Trinity is manifest in his treatises, *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ* (1679), and *A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (1674), in which he demonstrates his belief that the doctrine is a primary foundation of faith and life. These themes are given more detailed exegetical attention in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

In particular, as far as pastoral care is concerned, a vast amount of energy was expended throughout the seventeenth century in the defense of the Trinity against the Socinian view. Owen also would appear to call in question the assertion of a lessening of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in comparison with the doctrine of divine attributes in his treatises, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), and *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the*

¹⁶⁴ Turretin, *Inst. theol. elencticae*, III. Xxiv. 17 (*Institutio theologiae elencticae*, 3 vol. Geneva, 1679-85; a new edition, Edinburgh, 1847) cited from Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4: The Trinity of God*, 155.

Doctrine of the Trinity (1669).

2.1 One God in Three Persons as the Matrix of Sanctification

2.1.1 God's Trinitarian Self-Revelation

Owen makes a fundamental distinction between God as he is in himself and God as he is revealed to us. That is, the distinction Owen draws is between God as he knows himself and God as he reveals himself to others: "*Do we here know God as he is?* No; his glorious being is not of us, in this life, to be comprehended".¹⁶⁵ The same concern is apparent with regard to the Trinity:

Can we conceive these things as they are in themselves? Neither we nor yet the angels of heaven are at all able to dive into these secrets, as they are internally in God; but in respect of the outward dispensation of themselves to us by creation, redemption, and sanctification, a knowledge may be attained of these things, saving and heavenly.¹⁶⁶

For Owen, such argument demonstrates that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a proper

¹⁶⁵ Owen, *Works*, 1: 471. "Italics His"

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 473. "Italics His"

place for extensive rational demonstration and argumentation, but can be discussed only once the authority of revelation as has been accepted.

As to God's revelation, while appearing unhesitatingly to endorse that all divine operations are usually known by doctrinal testimonies, namely the Scripture,¹⁶⁷ Owen states that "God revealeth not himself unto us merely doctrinally and dogmatically, but by the declaration of what he doth for us, in us, and towards us, in the accomplishment of 'the counsel of his will'",¹⁶⁸

Owen undergirds such epistemology with the axiom that every outward work of God is a perfect work of the entire Trinity. It is fair to consider this argument a regulative principle in Owen's whole theology. Moreover, as to the framework of God's Trinitarian work, Owen lays down that "the order of operation in the blessed Trinity, as unto outward works, answereth unto and followeth the order of their subsistence".¹⁶⁹ As Trueman has commented:

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3: 158.

¹⁶⁹ Owen, *Works*, 19: 34 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 34) cited from Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 132.

Consistent with his orthodox understanding of the Trinity as being one substance in three persons who are distinguished from each other by their relations, Owen sees salvation as rooted in the inner life of the Trinity where the economy of salvation is based upon specific, individual roles for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... it is a basic axiom of his theology that acts *ad extra* mirror the internal intratrinitarian relationships.¹⁷⁰

2.1.2 The Economic and the Immanent Trinity

This emphasis on a close relation or even identity between the economic and the immanent Trinity suggests that Owen might well have endorsed Rahner's¹⁷¹ later rule

¹⁷⁰ Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 132.

¹⁷¹ Karl Rahner (1904-1984) was one of the main theologians to reawaken interest in Trinitarian theology. With Karl Barth on the Protestant side, he was trying to reconstitute the doctrine of the Trinity at the centre of the Christian mystery of salvation. He was critical of a rift between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity in the Western tradition. In order to correct the disjunction in standard Trinitarian theology, he advocated his famous rule, 'the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity'. In proposing his rule, Rahner was attempting to remedy the sorry state of isolation into which, in his judgment, Trinitarian theology had drifted with regard to the rest of Christian theology. Rahner's rule is well known and almost universally cited with approval in recent Trinitarian

that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity".¹⁷² But this rule itself admits of at least three interpretations.

Firstly, the God who in the activity of salvation appears as Triune (the economic Trinity) is Triune in himself (the immanent Trinity). There is one God, one divine self-communication, manifested in the one economy of creation, redemption, and consummation. The identity of the economic and the immanent Trinity, thus, means that what God has revealed and given in Christ and in the Spirit is the reality of God as God is from all eternity. In other words, the economy of salvation, the historical missions of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, are the only valid starting point for our knowledge of the Triune God.¹⁷³ This sense of Rahner's rule coincides with Owen's thought. While holding our knowledge of the Trinity to be founded on real representations of the divine nature in creation, redemption and sanctification, Owen believes that all extra-trinitarian acts, as was noted above, are themselves rooted in

theology. But the conceptuality which Rahner employed to state the identity of the immanent and the economic Trinity has provoked controversy.

¹⁷² K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

¹⁷³ See, Burke, Patrick. *Reinterpreting Rahner: a critical study of his major themes*, 73-90; Coffey, David. "Trinity", in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 98-108.

intra-trinitarian acts.¹⁷⁴ This has made it possible for Owen to reaffirm that soteriology is decisive for the doctrine of God, and to avoid perpetuating the post-Nicene problem created by the preoccupation with internal relations of God.

Second, the "is" of Rahner's rule may be taken to imply strict ontological identity between the economic and the immanent Trinity.¹⁷⁵ God's self-communication in history is exactly identical with God's eternal self-communication. The ontological identity can suggest that "a radical distinction between a statement about God in himself and God for us is not even legitimate."¹⁷⁶ In other words, the eternal mystery of God is not separated from the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to salvation, where God and all his creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of communion. So, there is no room for the freedom of the recipient to accept God's

¹⁷⁴ Owen, *Works*, 10: 163.

¹⁷⁵ Molnar, Paul D. *Divine Freedom and The Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*, 105-107; LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 216.

¹⁷⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, 54-55.

self-communication, because there is only one God, one self-communication, one triune mystery of love and communion, which has both eternal and temporal modalities. If so, the ontological identity would run the risk of allowing an agnosticism to lead toward pantheism.¹⁷⁷ Basically, in Owen's theology, the distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity, as shall be noted, can be found in his scheme of the covenant of redemption and grace through the Trinitarian dimension. In the scheme, he makes the covenant connection between God's eternal self-existence, his will to save, and the execution of that will in history.¹⁷⁸ The Trinity is at last revealed in order to show the sinner clearly how it is that God predestined and then put into action his plan to redeem his people. So, the Trinitarian acts within the context of the covenants are not primarily concerned to give direct theological propositions about the *ad intra* Triune processions, but to reveal how God is salvifically at work for us, through all three divine persons. In this sense, Owen states that:

This revelation is made unto us, not that our minds might be possessed with the notions of it, but that we may know aright how to place our trust

¹⁷⁷ Molnar, *Divine Freedom and The Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*, 106; LaCugna, *God for us*, 216.

¹⁷⁸ See Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 102-150.

in him, how to obey him and live unto him, how to obtain and exercise communion with him, until we come to the enjoyment of him.¹⁷⁹

Thus, in Owen's theology, the ontological identity between the economic and the immanent Trinity is never accepted.

Thirdly and finally, the rule may be taken to mean that the Trinity could not be fully itself apart from the orders of creation, redemption and sanctification.¹⁸⁰ In this conceptuality, Rahner's rule seems to have overly equated the triune missions in the world with the *ad intra* triune processions. For Rahner, the processions and missions are explicated in terms of God's self-expression and self-possession, according to his conception of the ontology of the symbol, which "entails the view that a real symbol not only expresses something; it does something".¹⁸¹ So the Father expresses himself in

¹⁷⁹ Owen, *Works*, 19: 34 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 34); Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 130, 132.

¹⁸⁰ LaCugna, *God for us*, 217; Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 296-298; Noia, J. A. Di. "Karl Rahner", in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth-Century*, 127.

¹⁸¹ Noia, "Karl Rahner," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian*

the Son in order to possess himself in the Spirit, and the processions of the Son and Spirit are processions of self-expression and self-possession.¹⁸² This tendency makes the free actions of creation, redemption, and sanctification into necessary extensions of God's inner self-expression and self-possession. By contrast, the economic Trinity in history, in Owen's mind, is not a mirror perfectly reflecting the immanent Trinity, because God's self-expression in the Son and the Spirit must be a genuinely new way in which God exists. Owen's exposition of the covenant of redemption can be interpreted as an extended reflection upon the implications of his understanding of God's works *ad extra* as dependent upon Trinitarian relations *ad intra* for the freedom of the divine purposes and counsels. The works of the economic Trinity reflect the freedom of the immanent Trinity to operate in new ways according to his free self-determination. Thus, Owen believes there can be an asymmetry between God as he is in himself and God as he is to us.

Given the above, in Owen's thought the distinction of the economic and the immanent Trinity attempts to secure both a correlation and a distinction between God's life with us in salvation history, and God as he is in himself. There is no ontological and

Theology in the Twentieth-Century, 128-129.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 129.

epistemological identity between them. Yet, there can be a consistent relation between them.

2.1.3 *Autotheos* and *Perichoresis*

Having posited this close relation between the economic and the immanent Trinity, Owen continually insists that “*there is one God; that this God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and so, that the Father is God, so is the Son, so is the Holy Ghost*”.¹⁸³ That is, each person is *autotheos*. Owen says:

The Father is of none, is *αὐταυτός*. The Son is begotten of the Father, having the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, and so is *αὐτοθεός* in respect of his nature, essence, and being, not in respect of his personality, which he hath of the Father. The Spirit is of the Father and the Son.¹⁸⁴

This stress on the equality of the persons is also shown in Owen’s unambiguous affirmation of the doctrine of *perichoresis*: “God is one; - that this one God is *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; - that *the Father is the Father of the Son*; and *the Son, the Son of*

¹⁸³ Owen, *Works*, 2: 379. “Italics His”

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 12: 392. “Italics His”

the Father; and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Father and Son; and that, in respect of this their mutual relation, they are distinct from each other".¹⁸⁵ Thus, since each is wholly God and fully God, no one person is any greater than any other, while the three together are not greater than any one.

Yet, the term *perichoresis* indicates the three persons are irreducibly different from one another:

There is a peculiar condescension of any person unto a work, wherein the others have no concurrence but by approbation and consent. Such was the susception of the human nature by the Son, and all that he did therein; and such was the condescension of the Holy Ghost also unto his office, which entitles him peculiarly and by way of eminence unto his own immediate works.¹⁸⁶

In this sense, Owen's theology is able to treat the Son in his incarnate work and the Spirit in the fulfillment of his office as distinct in their own activity.

This perichoretic approach to the Trinity should not be understood as a speculative doctrine, but as "one which was developed by means of a movement in thought from the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 2: 377.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 3: 94.

dynamic of the divine involvement in space and time to the implications of such an involvement for an understanding of the eternal dynamic of deity".¹⁸⁷ In this dynamic, Owen believes that, "while affirming the essential unity of God," there is "a real distinction in the action of the divine persons not only internally and reciprocally in the inner being of the Godhead..., but also outwardly as they condescend to their particular roles in the economy of salvation".¹⁸⁸

2.1.4 The Four Categories of *Opera Dei*

In elucidating the nature of God's unity and the distinction between Father, Son and Spirit, Owen seems to divide the *opera Dei* into four categories¹⁸⁹: the inward personal works or operations, namely, the divine begetting and proceeding, which are purely personal;¹⁹⁰ the inward essential works in the counsel and decree, which are common

¹⁸⁷ C. E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, 163.

¹⁸⁸ Alen J. Spence, "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," 173; Owen, *Works*, 3: 94-95.

¹⁸⁹ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4: The Triunity of God*, 257-258.

¹⁹⁰ Owen, *Works*, 2: 406-408.

works of all three persons;¹⁹¹ the outward essential works, which are undivided work of the three persons;¹⁹² and the outward works that are considered personal in a certain manner, namely, the outward works, like incarnation and sanctification, that are performed by the entire Godhead but that terminate on one or another of the persons.¹⁹³

The four categories of *opera Dei* accord with the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra*. This principle means that though one divine person does not act by another, as an intermediate cause, and as the power of all the persons is one and the same, each of them accomplishes an effect by the same immediate operation, yet particular work is attributed to particular persons on grounds of the personal *terminus* of the works.¹⁹⁴ “The personal distinction of the works assumes the undivided work of the Godhead but identifies both ‘the order of the Persons, which ought to be observed in their operation, as well as in their subsistence,’ and the termination of each divine act *ad extra* ‘upon some certain Person’.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 3: 66-67; 2: 405, 1: 144-145.

¹⁹² Ibid., 16: 342, 3: 162.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 3: 67, 160.

¹⁹⁴ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4: The Triunity of God*, 263.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 262; Witsius, *Exercitationes*, VI.iii; Beza et al., *Propositions and principles*, IV.

2.1.5 The Objective and Subjective Aspect of Sanctification

The personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra* may be applied to Owen's doctrine of the objective and subjective aspects of sanctification.

In this view, the entire Godhead is the remote and mediate cause or principle of the objective aspect of sanctification, and the Son (the incarnate Christ) the proximate and immediate cause or principle.

*"As unto authoritative designation, it was the act of the Father... As unto the formation of the human nature, it was the peculiar act of the Spirit...As unto the term of the assumption, or the taking of our nature unto himself, it was the peculiar act of the person of the Son."*¹⁹⁶ Hence, the completed aspect of sanctification has taken place in the incarnation, that is Christ, who is the Son of God, taking on human nature, in which the elect are not only once-for-all reconciled to God, but also are accepted by Him as His holy people. Thus, in the light of the doctrine of the hypostatic union between the two natures of Christ, Christ's obedience to God's will on earth is considered as the completed aspect of sanctification.

Iv.

¹⁹⁶ Owen, *Works*, 1: 225. "Italics His"

Through the mystery of the Trinity in one being with three persons, for Owen, believers' sanctification not only has been finished in Christ's vicarious obedience on earth, but also not yet completed, as related to His intercession on heaven. Thus, Christ in the Heavenly Temple is still working for the saint's sanctification, by the Holy Spirit, in order to bring him to participate in His sanctified humanity and its blessing. In this way, Christ's intercession through the Spirit in heaven involves the progressive aspect of sanctification.

Given the above, it should be said that the progressive aspect of sanctification is the consequence of the completed aspect by the work of the Triune God: that the Triune God first loved the world; that Christ suffered and died for sinners who were undeserving; and that believers become the temple of the Holy Spirit by Christ's indwelling. And the completed aspect of sanctification is the sole foundation of the progressive.

There is another aspect of Owen's doctrine of sanctification which is dependent on the Holy Spirit's work. This is the subjective aspect of sanctification.

The three persons of the Triune God have their respective place, the Father beginning and originating - Christ the procuring cause of the application by His intercession- and the Holy Spirit the proper and peculiar agent.

Sanctification can never be a human possibility apart from union with Christ by the Holy Spirit's proper work.¹⁹⁷ Christ Himself comes to the elect person in His Spirit so as that He dwells in him in such a way that everything that belongs to Him is his. This union with Christ is God's blessing in the Holy Spirit, without which the vicarious work of the incarnate Son for our sanctification is of no value. At the moment when the elect person is engrafted into Christ by the Holy Spirit he is no longer ruled by sin's dominion because union with Christ destroys union with sin. This is the definitive sanctification by the Holy Spirit's Proper Work within the Triune God's Common Work.

Furthermore, through the union of Christ with human nature and our union with the humanity of Christ, the saint is reckoned to have done in and with Christ whatever He accomplished in His substitutionary and redemptive work. So Owen declares union with Jesus Christ to be "the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations" in the saint's life.¹⁹⁸ This is the progressive sanctification by the Holy Spirit's "proper" work within the Triune God's common work.

In what way, then, is Owen to account for believers' sanctification on the basis of the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra*?

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 3: 516-527, 409, 386, 11: 337.

¹⁹⁸ Owen, *Works*, 21: 146 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 146).

By means of the *pactum salutis*.

2.2 The Covenant of Redemption as the Way of Sanctification

The next issue in the logical unfolding of the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra* consists of God's specific plan for believers' sanctification through the covenant of redemption.

2.2.1 In Relation to the Trinitarian Pattern

For Owen, "an absolutely complete covenant is a voluntary convention, pact, or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage."¹⁹⁹ Required are distinct persons, a voluntary decision about things in their power, for the mutual content and satisfaction of the persons involved. Where anything is distinctly required of one party three elements are present: a proposal of service; a promise of reward; and an acceptance of the proposal. This introduces an inequality and subordination- the one who prescribes is

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 19: 82 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 82).

superior to the one who obeys the prescriptions.²⁰⁰ “Of this nature is that divine transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of mankind.”²⁰¹ In this sense, Owen remarks:

these were carried on “per modum foederis,” “by way of covenant,” compact, and mutual agreement, between the Father and the Son; for although it should seem that because they are single acts of the same divine understanding and will, they cannot be properly federal, yet because those properties of the divine nature are acted distinctly in the distinct persons, they have in them the nature of a covenant. Besides, there is in them a supposition of *the susception of our human nature* into personal union with the Son. On the consideration hereof he comes to have an absolute distinct interest, and to undertake for that which is his own work peculiarly. And therefore are those counsels of the will of God, wherein lies the foundation of the priesthood of Christ, expressly declared as a covenant in the Scripture.²⁰²

Within Owen’s thought on the covenant of redemption, two subsections can be found: the role of God the Father in appointing Christ as Mediator and promising that he would

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 82-83.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 84.

²⁰² Ibid., 77. “*Italics His*”

protect, strengthen, and help him in accomplishment of his work, and that his mission would be successful and achieve its purpose;²⁰³ and the voluntary acceptance of this role by the Son.²⁰⁴ The acceptance of the role of Mediator involves Christ's willingness to take flesh, offer Himself as sacrifice, and intercede for the elect.²⁰⁵ All three elements are part of the one covenant and are thus a unity grounded in the office of Mediator.

Several points are worthy of note at this point. First, new sets of mutual relations and obligations emerge as a result of the covenant of redemption. Between the Father and the Son a new kind of subordination and mutual obligation obtains. The Father acquires a new right of headship and authority over the Son in this covenant, thereby having the authority to prescribe to the Son what is needed to glorify himself through the difficult task of the elect's sanctification.²⁰⁶ Yet the Father also is under new obligation in the covenant to enable and provide for the success of the Son's mission.²⁰⁷

Second, the Spirit as a covenanting partner is involved in this pact. The Spirit will form

²⁰³ Ibid., 10: 168-171.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 174, 19: 86-87 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18:86-87).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 10: 175-177.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 19: 84-85 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 84-85).

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 93.

the human nature of Christ, assisting Christ's oblation, and resurrection on earth.²⁰⁸

The Spirit will not bring attention to Himself, but will highlight the Son to the Father because Christ as a Mediator will continue to all eternity to be the vital Head and Husband of the church,²⁰⁹ and the vital good that this vital Head will eternally communicate to his church will be the Holy Spirit.²¹⁰

Third, within Owen's formulation of the covenant of redemption there appears to be a subordination of the members of the Trinity in their economic operations: one acts from another, and under another, and with dependence on one another so that the Father acts as Head of the Trinity, and the Son under him, and the Holy Spirit under them both. Conversely, this economic subordination is not grounded in any ontological hierarchy between the three.

2.2.2 In Relation to the Divine-Human Relationship

Why then must Christ be mediator who is both God and truly human according to the stipulations of the covenant of redemption? Owen's response brings us to the heart of his

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 10: 178-179.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 19: 93-94 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 93-94), 13: 338-340.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 13: 336-338, 3: 183-188, 2: 224-226.

economic-Trinitarian understanding of the divine-human relationship. According to Owen, Christ's work of mediation establishes a mutual conjunction whereby the divinity of Christ and our human nature are made to coalesce with each other, so that Christ is enabled to overcome the alienation between God and humanity and to span in Christ's one person the chasm that sin has introduced between God and human beings. It is clear that in the hypostatic union of Christ the sin-based opposition of the divine and the human is to be overcome.²¹¹ As a result, Owen affirms that:

The *mediate effects of Christ's* (role as a Mediator)... are ...of two sorts (1) *Moral*, as our *justification* and *pardon of sin*. (2) *Real*, on our *sanctification* and *holiness*. And hereunto, as God doth design them, so he effecteth holiness in all believers by virtue of the oblation and intercession of Jesus Christ. Wherefore, although the immediate actings of that office respect God alone as their proper object, yet the virtue and efficacy of them extend themselves unto our sanctification and holiness.²¹²

Apart from that, the reason for Christ's role as a Mediator according to the terms of the

²¹¹ Ibid., 1: 178-223.

²¹² Ibid., 3: 629-630. "Italics His"

covenant is that “we cannot bear the immediate approach of the Divine Being; but through him, as incarnate, are all things communicated unto us, in a way suited unto our reception and comprehension”.²¹³ In this connection, Owen states that:

By the beams of the sun, light, and life, and heat, unto the procreation, sustentation, refreshment, and cherishing of all things, are communicated. But if the sun itself should come down unto the earth, nothing could bear its heat and lustre; our eyes would not be enlightened but darkened by its glory, and all things be swallowed and consumed by its greatness; whereas, through the beams of it, every thing is enlightened and kindly refreshed. So is it with this eternal beam or brightness of the Father’s glory.²¹⁴

So, “the Lord Jesus Christ discharged his office and work of revealing the will of the Father in and by his human nature... for although the person of Christ, God and man, was our mediator... yet his human nature was that wherein he discharged the duties of

²¹³ Ibid., 1: 16.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

his office, and the “principium quod” of all his mediatory actings.”²¹⁵ From this basic formulation, Owen lays down that “God, in the human nature of Christ, did perfectly renew that blessed image of his on our nature which we lost in Adam, with an addition of many glorious endowments which Adam was not made partaker of.”²¹⁶ As a result, “one end of God in filling the human nature of Christ with all grace, in implanting his glorious image upon it, was, that he might in him propose *an example* of what he would by the same grace renew us unto, what we ought in a way of duty to labour after.”²¹⁷ God’s essential wisdom, image, and truth are communicated into Christ’s humanity through His incarnation without any commingling of attributes.²¹⁸

2.3 The Holy Spirit’s Work in Christ’s Humanity as the Source of Sanctification

One of the strengths of Owen’s Trinitarian theology is that, as noted above, while

²¹⁵ Ibid., 20: 30 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 30).

²¹⁶ Ibid., 1: 170.

²¹⁷ Ibid. “Italics His”

²¹⁸ Ibid., 54-85, 233-235.

affirming the patristic maxim, *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt*,²¹⁹ it recognized the *opera ad extra* as *opera certo modo personalia*, not only internally after the inner being of the Godhead, but also outwardly after their condescension to their particular roles in the economy of salvation.²²⁰

This Trinitarian interpretation played an important role in Owen's understanding of the *Communicatio idiomata* between the two natures in the person of Christ: first, there is an indirect action of the divine on the human in the person of the Son; secondly, any divine acts of the incarnate Son are due to empowerment by the Spirit:

I do not hereby ascribe the infusion of omniscience, of infinite understanding, wisdom, and knowledge, into the human nature of Christ. It was and is a creature, finite and limited, nor is a capable subject of properties absolutely infinite and immense. Filled it was with light and wisdom to the utmost capacity of a creature; but it was so, not by being changed into a divine nature or essence, but by the communication of the Spirit unto it without measure. The Spirit of the Lord did rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of

²¹⁹ Ibid., 3: 162.

²²⁰ Ibid., 198-199.

the Lord, and made him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.²²¹

2.3.1 In the Assumption of Human Nature

Owen does not ascribe divine attributes (omniscience, infinite wisdom, knowledge, and understanding) to the humanity of Christ, but his human nature was and is a creature, finite and limited; in other words, it was incapable of properties absolutely infinite, omnipotent and immense.²²² Thus, while rejecting the Apollinarian position of having the Logos substitute for a human soul or mind, which leaves Jesus less than fully human, the apparent Christological difficulty is resolved by Owen's strong pneumatology; the Spirit unites the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, uniquely filling his human nature with the Spirit beyond measure, as "a fulness like that of light in the sun, or of water in the sea."²²³

More significantly, while Owen wholeheartedly argues that the Son incarnate was truly

²²¹ Ibid., 1: 93.

²²² Ibid., 232-235.

²²³ Ibid., 2: 61.

human, his human nature is to be distinguished from the rest of fallen humanity. Similarly, when Owen states that the incarnate Christ is free from original sin, he describes two aspects of this reality as being 1) the “*guilt of the first sin*” and 2) the “*derivation of a polluted, corrupted nature*” coming from Adam.²²⁴ Since Christ was never federally in Adam, he cannot be counted guilty like the rest of humanity. Adam’s guilt does not apply to Jesus personally. As a result, Owen claims that the incarnate Christ acting as a second Adam singly fulfils the covenant of works, being victorious where Adam failed.²²⁵ In this sense, Owen considers Christ to have genuinely received a human nature equivalent to the prelapsarian nature of Adam, in the act of conception, by the Holy Spirit.²²⁶

At this point, for Owen, it is an oversimplification to say that either he assumed a prelapsarian human nature, which is completely alien and oblivious to the painful realities of a fallen world, or that he assumed a fallen human nature, just like every other

²²⁴ Ibid., 64. “Italics His” cited from Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 98.

²²⁵ Ibid., 65.

²²⁶ Ibid., 3: 165-169.

human except that he never engages in personal acts of sin.²²⁷ Thus, it becomes apparent that Owen employs the prominence of the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus' life as the means for maintaining both continuity and discontinuity between the humanity of Christ and fallen humanity. That is, for Owen, Jesus assumes natural infirmities, not sinful infirmities.²²⁸

2.3.2 In Christ's Earthly Life

The Spirit continued the work of sanctification in Christ's humanity during His life on earth. Christ experiences "all grace by the rational faculties and powers of his soul, his understanding, will, and affections; for he acted grace as a man."²²⁹ In these faculties' "increase, enlargement, enlargement, and exercise, there was required a progression in

²²⁷ Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 93-104.

²²⁸ Owen, *Works*, 19: 233-234, 466-467 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 233-234, 466-467); Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 93-104.

²²⁹ Owen, *Works*, 3: 169.

grace also; and this he had continually by the Holy Spirit.”²³⁰ “The human nature of Christ was capable of having *new objects* proposed to its mind and understanding.”²³¹ Through his experience in a fully and truly human way, he grew in wisdom and knowledge, and in new trials and temptations he experimentally learned the new exercise of grace by the constant work of the Holy Spirit in the human nature of Christ.²³² So in Christ uniquely, ongoing growth in obedience was progressed by the work of the Holy Spirit who, “continually, upon all occasions... gave out of his unsearchable treasures grace for exercise in all duties and instances of it. From hence was he (Christ) habitually holy, and from hence did he exercise holiness entirely and universally in all things.”²³³

By the immediate work of the Holy Spirit to sustain Christ’s humanity with its natural infirmities, Christ was directed, strengthened, supported, and comforted in all his temptations, troubles, persecution, and suffering from first to last.²³⁴ And when Christ

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 170. “Italics His”

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 170-171.

²³⁴ Ibid., 174-175.

offered himself to God in and by those actings of the grace of the Holy Spirit in Christ's humanity, Christ showed love to mankind and compassion toward sinners, and manifested his righteousness, holiness and severity against sin.²³⁵ What is more, in the time of Christ offering by the Spirit in Christ's humanity, He exercised "His *holy submission and obedience unto the will of God... and trusted in God...* with fervent prayers, and cries, and supplications."²³⁶

Given the above, it is clear that through these experiences, Christ's humanity was refined and developed into spiritual maturity through the Holy Spirit's immediate work for the prototype of all believers' sanctification. As Owen writes:

In the collation of all grace on Christ, God designed to make him 'the first-born of many brethren;' that is, not only to give him the power and authority of the first-born, with the trust of the whole inheritance to be communicated unto them, but also as the example of what he would bring them unto. 'For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,' Heb.ii. 11. It is Christ who sanctifieth believers; yet it is from God, who first sanctified him, that he and they might be of one, and so become

²³⁵ Ibid., 177-178.

²³⁶ Ibid., 178-179. "Italics His"

brethren, as bearing the image of the same Father. God designed and gave unto Christ grace and glory; and he did it that he might be the prototype of what he designed unto us, and would bestow upon us.²³⁷

Hence, in Owen's thought the source for the sanctification of all believers can be found in the Holy Spirit's work in Christ's humanity.

2.4 Conclusion

Let us close this chapter on a very significant and special point concerning the correlation between Trinitarian understanding and the doctrine of sanctification of John Owen. As we have seen throughout this Chapter, the Trinitarian pattern, namely, One God with three persons, proves to be pivotal in Owen's understanding of sanctification. By the eternal transactions between the Father and the Son as being carried on "*per modum foederis*" (by way of covenant, compact, and mutual agreement), the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra* emerge. The personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra* serve as the matrix of the objective and subjective aspects of sanctification. Given Owen's thought on the

²³⁷ Ibid., 1: 170-171.

incarnation, as the act of Triune God, it is hardly surprising that for Owen Christ's humanity shared in the same natural infirmities as ourselves. So the Holy Spirit energized, sanctified, comforted, raised and glorified the man Christ Jesus.

According to Christ's natural infirmities, He participated in human suffering such as hunger, poverty, weariness, sorrow, reproach, shame, contempt, whereby his holy soul was deeply affected. The experience brought him to put his trust in God, and to look for deliverance from him in every time of danger. Therefore, although he was the Son of God, within the Holy Spirit's immediate work he learned obedience from what he suffered, so that he became the prototype for the sanctification of all believers.

But how is Owen able to reconcile Christ's unfallenness with recognition of His bodily weakness?

Firstly, Christ's human nature does not exist independently of his human person.²³⁸ The only reason Christ's human nature exists is its assumption by the Son.²³⁹ In other words, the human nature itself is not a person. It is *anhypostatic*. This means that any quality ascribed to Christ must be ascribed to his person. Hence, to say that Christ was "fallen" is to say that he, a divine person, was fallen.

²³⁸ Ibid., 233, 2: 329, 3: 165.

²³⁹ Ibid., 3: 160-161.

Secondly, the humanity which the Son assumed in the womb of the Virgin Mary was sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of virginal conception. So, Christ's faculties were created free from the guilt of the first sin and the polluted, corrupted nature coming from Adam.²⁴⁰ Thus Christ's human nature was not fallen.

Third, a continuing work of the Holy Spirit was required in Christ's human nature, according to the concept of *Communio gratiarum*.²⁴¹

It is axiomatic, for Owen, that "all rational creatures, including even prelapsarian Adam and the incarnate Christ require the Holy Spirit to enable them to live to God."²⁴² As he notes:

It (Christ's human nature) was by the Holy Spirit positively endowed with all grace. And hereof it was afterward only capable of farther degrees as to actual exercise, but not of any new kind of grace. And this work of sanctification, or the original infusion of all grace into the human nature of Christ, was the immediate work of the Holy Spirit; which was necessary

²⁴⁰ bid., 2: 64-66.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 1: 93, 3: 168-183. See also Macleod, Donald. *The Person of Christ*, 195-199; Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 434-438.

²⁴² Kapic, *Communion with God*: 86.

unto him: for let the natural faculties of the soul, the mind, will, and affections, be created pure, innocent, undefiled, – as they cannot be otherwise immediately created of God, – yet there is not enough to enable any rational creature to live to God; much less was it all that was in Jesus Christ.²⁴³

So, “by being a perfect man, his rational soul was in him the immediate principle of all his moral operations, even as ours are in us.”²⁴⁴ And Christ required the Holy Spirit to faithfully direct his faculties to the Father. Thus, as Christ depended on the continuing work of the Spirit, his wisdom and knowledge was objectively increased in a manner corresponding with the natural progress of his humanity, and he experimentally learned the new exercise of grace in new trials and temptations.²⁴⁵

Fourthly, Christ’s human nature is described as having natural infirmities, because “he was not to have an ubiquitarian body, a body commensurate to the Deity... nor was his soul to be free from the affections which are connatural to a human rational soul, as love, joy, fear, sorrow, shame, and the like, nor was his body to be free from being

²⁴³ Owen, *Works*, 3: 168.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 3: 170-171.

obnoxious unto hunger, thirst, cold, pain, death itself.”²⁴⁶ According to Owen, these weaknesses are “*inseparable adjuncts*”²⁴⁷ of Christ’s human nature. However, as the result of original sin, in all other humans these things “are attended with irregular perturbations for the most part”.²⁴⁸ But while sinful human beings have difficulty controlling their bodily weakness, Christ did not allow his weakness to rule him or to exceed its proper limits, because Jesus’ faculties were working correctly. Yet, because of Christ’s natural infirmities, there can be no denying the reality of his temptations, even though he was not internally tempted²⁴⁹: “whatever sufferings the soul of a man may be brought under, by grief, sorrow, shame, fear, pain, danger, loss, by any afflictive passions within or impressions of force from without, he underwent, he felt it all.”²⁵⁰

Given the above, in order to understand how Owen is able to reconcile unfallenness with his recognition of Christ’s bodily weakness, we should see the distinction between natural infirmities and sinful infirmities. It is clear that Christ was familiar with all

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 20: 467 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 467).

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 3: 170. “Italics Mine”

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 20: 467 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 467).

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 468.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 484.

bodily weakness, such as fear, sorrow, hunger, thirst, cold, pain, because of his natural infirmities. But, unlike fallen humanity, he did not experience these things with inordinate disposition.

Chapter 3

The Objective Aspect of Sanctification in the Covenant of Redemption

Owen's Christology lies within the bounds of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, but he develops a more distinctive form of Reformed Christology within the context of both the ontological continuity of Jesus with the hypostasis of the Son as in Cyril's Christology, and the protection of the full humanity of Christ as in Nestorius's Christology.²⁵¹

In order to prevent the divine nature overwhelming the human nature in the hypostatic union, Owen makes a clear distinction between the assumption (in which, while the divine person was active, the human person was passive), and the hypostatic union (in which there were mutual relations of the natures).²⁵²

Such a distinction presents a truly human Jesus Christ. Moreover, since the eternal divine Son became man, the integrity of the natures and the unity of person were preserved by

²⁵¹ See further, Stephen R. Holmes, "Reformed Varieties of the Communicatio Idiomatum," in *The Person of Christ*, 78-86.

²⁵² Owen, *Work*, 1: 225-226. For further study, see Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 78-84; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 156.

drawing heavily upon the work of the Spirit. That is to say, while the eternal divine Son was able to act independently of the human nature he assumed - based on the doctrine of the *extra Calvinisticum* - Owen affirms that Jesus acted as man, the God-man, empowered by the Spirit.²⁵³

Protecting the assertion of the full humanity of Christ, Owen argues that God's image was first restored in Christ's own human nature as the prototype of all saints.²⁵⁴ This background in Owen's Christology prepares us for discussing his theology of sanctification in the covenant of redemption, especially his view of sanctification as already completed by Christ's proper work on earth within the Triune God's common work.

²⁵³ Ibid., 92, 3: 161-162, 169. See Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology", 71-85.

²⁵⁴ Owen, *Works*, 1: 170 cited from Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology", 71-85.

3.1 Sanctification as Already Completed by Christ's Proper Work on Earth within the Triune God's Common Work

This aspect of sanctification as already completed by Christ should be interpreted in a two-fold light.

3.1.1 In the Person of Christ

Owen states that Christ is given as our pattern and example of sanctification according to the infinite wisdom of God:²⁵⁵

He is so as he is the *exemplary cause* of our holiness. The design of God in working grace and holiness in us is, that 'we may be conformed unto the image of his Son, that he may be the firstborn among many brethren,' Rom. viii. 29; and our design in attaining of it is, first that we may be like him, and then that we may express or 'show forth the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light,' unto his glory and honour, 1 Pet. ii. 9. To this end is he proposed, in the purity of his natures, the holiness of his person, the glory of his graces, the innocence and usefulness of his conversation in the world, as the great *idea* and *exemplar*, which in all things we ought to conform ourselves unto. And as the nature of evangelical holiness consists herein, - namely, in a universal conformity unto him as he is the image of the invisible God, - so the proposal of his

²⁵⁵ Owen, *Works*, 3: 513.

example unto us is an effectual means of ingenerating and increasing it in us.²⁵⁶

At this point, Owen suggests that Christ is his people's example of sanctification in two ways. First, there is no other complete example for the believer's sanctification apart from Jesus Christ.

He(Christ) is not only in himself, *morally* considered, the most perfect, absolute, glorious *pattern* of all grace, holiness, virtue, obedience, to be chosen and preferred above all others, but he *only* is so; there is no other complete example of it... in this our great exemplar, as there was never the least shadow of variableness from the perfection of holiness (for "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," yea, "in him was light, and no darkness at all'), so were all his graces, all his acting of them, all his duties, so absolute and complete, as that we ought to aim no higher, nor to propose any other pattern unto ourselves. And who is it that, aiming at any excellency, would not design the most absolute and perfect example? This, therefore, is to be found as unto holiness in Christ, and in him alone.²⁵⁷

From this, Owen clearly holds that Christ's human nature had the property of being

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 509. "Italics His"

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 510. "Italics His"

sinless. Such a view draws our attention to the work of Holy Spirit toward the incarnate Christ's humanity. In other words, through the Holy Spirit's work in the extraordinary virgin birth, the Son assumes a sinless human nature, lives a life of absolute faithfulness to God.²⁵⁸ In this sense, Owen seems to consider the sin in human nature to be accidental rather than essential to it, given its creation as the image of God. Thus the Son's assumption of human nature perfected immediately prior to, or in conception, preserves his true identification with humanity, but also frees him by the Holy Spirit from inherited guilt and sin.²⁵⁹ Moreover, the Spirit's work in the life of Jesus does not end at the miraculous conception, but continues throughout his earthly life. "From hence was he (Christ) habitually holy, and from hence did he exercise holiness entirely and universally in all things."²⁶⁰ Accordingly, Owen's formulation concerning the Holy Spirit's activity in the incarnate Christ's humanity indicates that if Christ is the one to

²⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 162-167; 12: 293; 19: 153-154 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 153-154, 159) cited from Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 100.

²⁵⁹ Owen, *Works*, 2: 64-69.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3: 170-171.

whom believers must look, then just as the Holy Spirit supernaturally worked in Jesus' humanity during his whole life, securing his entire sanctification, so will the Spirit of Christ work in believers' sanctification.²⁶¹

The second reason that Christ is the believers' example of sanctification is that he was appointed by God for this task:

He is *appointed of God* for this purpose. One end why God sent his Son to take our nature upon him, and to converse in the world therein, was, that he might set us an example in our nature, in one who was like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, of that renovation of his image in us, of that return unto him from sin and apostasy, of that holy obedience which he requireth of us... As God hath appointed the consideration of Christ as an especial ordinance unto the increase of holiness in us, so his holy obedience, as proposed unto us, hath a peculiar efficacy unto that purpose beyond all other instituted examples.²⁶²

This argument appears to assume both Christ's natural consubstantiality with the Father,

²⁶¹ Ibid., 159-188 where Owen describes at length the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ.

²⁶² Ibid., 510-511. "Italics His"

and a subordination of Christ to the Father not simply in terms of his divinity but also in terms of office. Needless to say, the points about Christ's consubstantiality with the Father, and distinction to the Father lead us to Owen's thought concerning the representative image of Jesus Christ. As Owen states:

in him was manifested the glory of the Father. He 'is the image of the invisible God.' In him God was, in him he dwelt, in him is he known, in him is he worshipped according unto his own will, in him is there a nearer approach made unto us by the divine nature than ever could enter into the heart of man to conceive. In the constitution of his person- of two natures, so infinitely distinct and separate in themselves- and in the work it was designed unto, the wisdom, power, goodness, love, grace, mercy, holiness, and faithfulness of God, are manifested unto us. This is the one blessed 'image of the indivisible God,' wherein we may learn, wherein we may contemplate and adore, all his divine perfections.²⁶³

From this, Owen may be saying that the source of the representative image is not the Son, but the Father, because on the basis of what we have already learned about the requirement of the covenant of redemption, in which both the will and the authority of the Father are expressed, and the willingness and agreement of the Son in his devotion to

²⁶³

Ibid., 1:73.

the Father, the incarnate Christ is the Servant of the Father.²⁶⁴ For the representative image of Jesus Christ, God (the Father) implanted his glorious image and filled all grace upon Christ's humanity.²⁶⁵ As a result, "he is the prototype and exemplar in the eye of God for the communication of all grace unto us, so he ought to be the great example in the eye of our faith in all our obedience unto God, in our compliance with all that he requireth of us."²⁶⁶

On this point, Owen declares that:

It is Christ who sanctifieth believers; yet it is from God, who first sanctified him, that he and they might be of one, and so become brethren, as bearing the image of the same Father. God designed and gave unto Christ grace and glory; and he did it that he might be the proper type of what he designed unto us, and would bestow upon us. Hence the apostle shows that the effect of this predestination to conformity unto the image of the Son is the communication of all effectual, saving graces, with the glory that ensues thereon, Rom. viii. 30, 'Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he

²⁶⁴ Owen, *Works*, 19: 95 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 95).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 170.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

justified, them he also glorified.²⁶⁷

Thus, by consistently emphasizing the relationship between God (the Father), Christ, and us (all saints), Owen seems to say that what “God did in Christ he was later to do in us, and thus the source of our sanctification is common, the image we bear in common, thus we are truly brethren.”²⁶⁸

3.1.2 In the Work of Christ

For Owen, the starting point of the work of Christ is his humiliation. Owen describes the humiliation of Christ as His self-emptying (εκενωσις).²⁶⁹ This is explained as follows:

He veiled himself, he shadowed himself, he hid his divine nature, and he eclipsed the glory of it. Not absolutely; all things under heaven cannot veil, eclipse, or hide, the glory of the divine nature. But he eclipsed, shadowed, hid, and laid it aside, as to himself and his interest in it: for upon his taking our nature upon him, men were so far from looking on

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 170-171. “Italics Mine”

²⁶⁸ Spence, “Christ’s Humanity and Ours: John Owen,” in *Persons, Divine and Human*, 85.

²⁶⁹ Owen, *Works*, 16: 494.

him as God, that they did not look on him as a good man.²⁷⁰

In addition, negatively, Owen states:

When Christ humbled himself, he did not leave, he did not relinquish, he did not forego, his divine nature. He did not cease to be God when he became man. The foundation of it lay here: He was ‘in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,’ Phil. ii. 6. He was “in the form of God.” God hath no innate form but his nature, his being, his essence; and therefore to be ‘in the form of God’ is to be participant of the nature, essence, and being of God. What follows thereon? He ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ the Father, in dignity, power, and authority.²⁷¹

From this Owen seems to be saying that in becoming incarnate, the second person of the Trinity did not abdicate any of his responsibilities or attributes, but merely restricted the exercise of certain of his attributes, such as his power and knowledge, for the period he was incarnate.

Owen also describes the humiliation of Christ as his humbling of himself

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 498.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 496.

(ταπεινωσις).²⁷² “Having taken this form of a servant, what did he do?”²⁷³

In his exposition of Hebrews he adds the further thought that the ταπεινωσις consists in the fact that he not only took human nature but took it in a lowly form:

He did not immediately take the nature he had assumed into glory; but he first became a “servant” in it,- a servant to God, to do his will, and that in the most difficult service that ever God had to do in this world. In that in this service he “made himself of *no reputation*.”²⁷⁴

Owen seems to maintain that though “there is an infinite distance between the εκκενωσις, the self-emptying of Christ, when, ‘being in the form of God, he took upon himself the form of a servant,’ and the ταπεινωσις, the taking on him the form of a servant to obey and die,”²⁷⁵ this former, as Richard Daniels states, does not negate the significance of the latter.²⁷⁶ In other words, “all that he (Christ) ever did or doth, all that ever he underwent or suffered as mediator, was for the saints, not only the

²⁷² Ibid., 494.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 21: 526 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 526). “Italics His”

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 16: 494.

²⁷⁶ Richard W. Daniels, *The Christology of John Owen*, 267.

condescension of kenosis, but all that he suffered in his life: fulfilling all righteousness, enduring all manner of persecutions and hardships, doing all manner of good to men.”²⁷⁷

In Owen’s theology concerning Christ’s work, two basic patterns happily coexist: that of the two states of humiliation and exaltation, and that of the threefold office.²⁷⁸ The threefold office of Christ, like the movement from humiliation to exaltation, describes the whole work of Christ and thereby serves again to direct attention structurally and functionally to the historical and economical perspective of Owen’s theology.²⁷⁹ It is appropriate, therefore, to set it within the framework of the threefold office.

3.1.2.1 The Priestly Office

As for the priestly office of Christ, for Owen, there are two parts in Christ’s priestly office, namely, oblation and intercession. In particular, the completed aspect of the saint’s sanctification is involved in the oblation of Christ. Christ’s oblation includes all things pertaining to Christ’s humiliation such as his incarnation, kenosis, being made under the law, his poverty and sufferings according to the requirement of the covenant of

²⁷⁷ Ibid.; Owen, *Works*, 2: 135.

²⁷⁸ Trucman, *The Claims of Truth*, 165.

²⁷⁹ See Owen, *Works*, 1: 85-100.

redemption. With respect to that, Owen argues that although in the general course of Christ's life his state was temptation, suffering, and humiliation he was not only "*materially holy, but formally obediential*"²⁸⁰:

He did all things because it was the will and law of God that so he should do. And this obedience to God was the life and beauty of the holiness of Christ himself; yea, obedience unto God in any creature is the formal reason constituting any act or duty to be good or holy... Wherefore the whole course of the life of Christ was a course of obedience unto God; whereon he so often professed that he kept the commands and did the will of him that sent him, thereby "fulfilling all righteousness."²⁸¹

In addition to that, the death of Christ on the cross was "the sum and complement of his oblations",²⁸² which was a peculiar obedience of Christ.

In this manner, Owen asserts that as he lived in general obedience to what God required of man as creature, and in specific obedience to what God required of Him as Messiah,

Christ himself learned obedience; for by reason of them he had occasion to

²⁸⁰ Owen, *Works*, 21: 523 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 523). "Italics His"

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 10: 179.

exercise those graces of humility, self-denial, meekness, patience, faith, which were habitually resident in his holy nature, but were not capable of the peculiar exercise intended but by reason of his sufferings. But, moreover, there was still somewhat peculiar in that obedience which the Son of God is said to learn from his own sufferings, namely, what it is for a *sinless person* to suffer for sinners, 'the just for the unjust.' The obedience herein was peculiar unto him, nor do we know, nor can we have an experience of the ways and paths of it.²⁸³

So, the proper acts of Christ's oblation did "*immediately*, such as respect God himself; as *atonement, reconciliation, satisfaction...* Without a supposition of these all other things are rendered useless. We can neither be *sanctified* nor *saved* by him unless sin be first *expiated* and God *atoned*."²⁸⁴ Hence, "Evangelical holiness is purchased for us by him (Christ), according to the tenor of the everlasting covenant, is promised unto us on his account."²⁸⁵

3.1.2.2 The Prophetic Office

²⁸³ Ibid., 21: 525 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 525). "Italics His"

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 3: 629. "Italics His"

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 506.

With respect to Christ's prophetic office, the connection between Christ's consubstantiality with the Father and his eternal appointment as Mediator, is crucial to Owen's understanding of the office. So while the divinity of Christ secured his knowledge of the Father's will, his humanity was accommodated to reveal the knowledge to other human beings.²⁸⁶

Owen emphasises two parts of Christ's prophetic work:

1. The *revelation* of God in his *name* and *love*, in the mystery of his *grace*, and *goodness*, and *truth*, by his *promises*, that we may *believe* in him. 2. The *revelation* of God in his *will* and *commands* that we may *obey* him.²⁸⁷

Owen refers to this latter as the revelation of the perceptive will of God²⁸⁸ and goes on to highlight three things in "the *doctrine of obedience* that Christ teacheth."²⁸⁹

Owen concludes that:

(Christ) he restored the law to its pristine crown, as the Jews have a tradition that it shall be done in the days of the Messiah. Herein did the

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 1:92-93, 20: 30-31(Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 30-31).

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 3: 631. "Italics His"

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 633. "Italics His"

Lord Christ place the beginning of his prophetical office and ministry, Matt. v., vi., vii. He opened, unveiled, explained, and vindicated, the preceptive part of the will of God before revealed, to the end that by a compliance therewith we should be holy. The full revelation of the mind and will of God, in the perfection and spirituality of the command, was reserved for Christ in the discharge of his office; and he gave it unto us that we might have a perfect and complete rule of holiness.²⁹⁰

Apart from that, Owen holds that for the church of all ages Christ's prophetical office takes in the ministry of the apostles.

The discharge of it (this office) with respect unto the *church of all all ages*, which takes in the *ministry* of the apostles, as divinely inspired by him (Christ), consisted in the *revelation of those duties of holiness*, which although they had a general *foundation* in the *law*, and the *equity* of them was therein established, yet could they never have been known to be duties in their *especial nature*, incumbent on us and necessary unto us, but by his teachings and instructions. Hence are they called old and new commandments in distinct senses. Such are faith in God through himself, brotherly love, denial of ourselves in taking up the cross, doing good for evil, with some others of the same kind; and how great a part of evangelical holiness consists in these things is known. Besides, he also teacheth us all

²⁹⁰

Ibid., 632.

those ordinances of worship wherein our obedience unto him belongs unto our holiness also, whereby it is enlarged and promoted.²⁹¹

3.1.2.3 The Kingly Office

As regards the kingly office, Owen lays down that although the investiture of Christ as king took place only at His exaltation, yet “He was king when the Lord of glory was crucified.”²⁹² That is to say, as Trueman asserts, “the investiture as king is not therefore something entirely new, but reflects the move from humiliation to exaltation which is implicit in the structure of mediation as determined by the covenant of redemption.”²⁹³ In the admission to the regal office, Christ was appointed heir by the Father. The word heir indicates two things with respect to Christ. The first is title, dominion or lordship.²⁹⁴ The second is possession: “Christ is made actual possessor of that which he hath title unto.”²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Ibid., 632-633. “Italics His”

²⁹² Ibid., 12:373.

²⁹³ Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 181.

²⁹⁴ Owen, *Works*, 20: 42 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 42).

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

For Owen, the work of Christ as a king may be reduced to these heads:

1. To make his subjects *free*; 2. To preserve them in *safety*, delivering their souls from deceit and violence; 3. In giving them *prosperity*, and increasing their wealth; 4. In establishing assured *peace* for them; 5. In giving them *love* among themselves; 6. In placing the *interest* and *welfare* of his kingdom in all their *affecting*; 7. In eternally *rewarding* their *obedience*.²⁹⁶

“All these,” Owen concludes, “he (Christ) doth principally by working grace and holiness in them, as might be easily demonstrated. I suppose none question but that the principal work of Christ towards us as our head and king is in making and preserving of us holy; I shall not, therefore, farther insist thereon.”²⁹⁷

3. 2 Sanctification as Progressive by Christ's Proper Work in Heaven within the Triune God's Common Work

Having established that as with all of God's works, Christ's earthly life is the act of the Triune God with each person equally concerned in their operation but distinctly involved in some aspect of the work, Owen identifies three things which set out the greatness and

²⁹⁶ Ibid.,3: 637.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

glory of Christ's ascension: his passage through the heavens,²⁹⁸ his reception into glory,²⁹⁹ and the exaltation consisting of his being seated at God's right hand.³⁰⁰ Moreover, Owen affirms that though "the divine nature of Christ is capable of no real exaltation by *an addition of glory*, but only by the way of *manifestation*... the human nature of Christ, or Christ in his human nature... is *capable of this real exaltation* by a real *addition of glory*."³⁰¹

As for the exaltation of Christ's humanity, Owen states that in His exaltation:

A creature, as was the human nature of Christ, cannot be made God, by an essential communication of divine properties unto it. Neither are they so communicable, nor is that a capable subject of their inhesion... whatever belongs unto Christ with respect unto either nature, belongs unto the person of Christ; and therein he is all that he is in either nature; and in both hath done and doth what in either of them he hath done and doth, they yet continuing distinct in their essential properties... this exaltation and glory of Christ in his human nature is not only absolutely above, but also of

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 21: 407 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 407).

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 408-409.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 1: 251.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 23: 11-12 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 22: 11-12). "Italics His"

another kind, than the utmost of what any other *created being* either hath or is capable of.³⁰²

The point of the exposition is presumably part at least of what the Chalcedonian formula means by claiming that the union of the Son of God and human nature takes place without change. That is to say, not even the glorification of Christ involves the impartation of divine properties to his humanity. So by arguing that there is no real communication of the attributes of the divine nature to the human in Christ's person even in his ascension Owen seems to be saying that there remains the grace of union, habitual grace, grace of office and grace of honour, in Christ's humanity by the communication of the Holy Spirit in heaven. As Owen writes:

As the state of his body is more glorious than ours shall be, so will that of his soul in itself be made appear to be more excellent than what we are capable of. For that fulness of the Spirit without measure and of all grace,

³⁰² Ibid., 12-13. "Italics His" According to Jonathan Jong-Chun, in Owen's theology, the human nature of Christ in His ascension is a magnificent sign of blessing and encouragement to the saint as creature. See Won, "Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans", 283-286.

which his nature was capacitated for by virtue of the hypostatical union,
doth now shine forth in all excellency and glory.³⁰³

In Owen's theology there is further evidence for Christ's proper work within the Triune God's common work after Christ's ascension. It is an actual application of the Holy Spirit, from the Father, by the Lord Christ, to the saints for their sanctification. Owen, as Ferguson notes, is "one of relatively few theologians who have spelled out the implications of Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost: 'exalted to the right hand of God he has received from the Father the promise of the Spirit' (Act ii.33)."³⁰⁴

As was noted, according to the covenant of redemption, after fulfilling the requirement of the Father, Christ was exalted to the right hand of God. There he received the Holy Spirit to work continually for his Church. Thus, through the agency of the Spirit, the ascended Christ is still working to communicate the blessings that flow from his fulfillment, given from the heart of the covenant of redemption to his people.

More significantly, as previously stated, for Owen "there are two works of this kind which he (the Holy Spirit) hath to do and doth effect- first, To unite us to Christ; and,

³⁰³ Ibid., 1: 246.

³⁰⁴ Ferguson, "John Owen and The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit", in *John Owen - the man and his theology*, 116. See also Owen, *Works*, 3: 185.

secondly, To communicate all grace unto us from Christ, by virtue of that union.³⁰⁵

For Owen, Christ's proper work within the opera *ad extra* of the whole Trinity makes it possible to exercise Christ's mediatorial office until he has put all rule and authority and power, and all his enemies, under his feet. Hence, Owen seems to regard the threefold office of Christ in heaven as providing a framework for an exhaustive statement of Christ's mediatorial dealings with reference to the doctrine of sanctification.

3.2.1 The Prophetical Work

Let us consider the prophetical office of Christ in heaven. Against the Socinians' view according to which Christ was adopted as Son of God as a reward for His work, Owen, as noted earlier, lays down that Christ is not only eternally God, but also Mediator, arguing from the Trinitarian basis of the covenant of redemption. In this context, Owen suggests that the Holy Spirit who communicated the divine knowledge to His human nature was the foundation of Christ's sufficiency for the discharge of his prophetical office.³⁰⁶ Indeed, this intimate relationship between Owen's pneumatology and his

³⁰⁵ Owen, *Works*, 3: 516.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 20: 30 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 30).

Christology is applied even to Christ's ascension. This relationship is both the completed aspect of sanctification in Christ and the moral responsibilities of the believer's life.

Concerning the objective aspect of sanctification in Christ's prophetic office in heaven the pneumatological emphasis of Owen's Christology is underlined as follows:

when he thus left this world and ascended into glory, the great promise he made unto his disciples- as they were to be preachers of the gospel, and in them unto all that should succeed them in that office- was, that he would 'send the Holy Spirit unto them,' to teach and guide them, to lead them into all truth,- to declare unto them the mysteries of the will, grace, and love of God, for the use of the whole church.³⁰⁷

From this, two things should be noted.³⁰⁸ In the first place, Christ's prophetic office in heaven continues through the work of the Holy Spirit, guiding his people into all truth (the Bible) through the saving illumination of their minds.³⁰⁹ In this manner, Owen asserts that:

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 1: 251. See also *ibid.*, 483.

³⁰⁸ These two things are related to the anointing and unction of the Holy Spirit within the context of progressive sanctification. See chapter 4.

³⁰⁹ Owen, *Works*, 1: 483.

None, therefore, could be the prophet of the church, but he who had the power to send the Holy Spirit to enable it to receive his doctrine by the saving illumination of the minds of men. And this alone he could do, whose Spirit he is, proceeding from him; whom he therefore frequently promised so to send. Without a respect unto these things, we cannot really be made partakers of the saving benefits and fruits of the prophetic office of Christ.³¹⁰

Secondly, Christ's prophetic office in heaven continues through the work of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the gospel.³¹¹ As Owen writes:

Thus was the Lord Christ, the Son of God, "from heaven" in the declaration of the gospel... That in the declaration of the gospel by Jesus Christ from heaven, there is a *call*, an invitation of sinners to draw nigh, to come unto him, to be made partakers of the good things contained therein. This way of the proposal of the gospel was foretold by the prophets, as Isa. lv. 1-3. So it was constantly insisted on by him, Matt. xi. 28, John vii. 37, 38. 'Come unto me,' was the life and grace of the gospel.³¹²

³¹⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹¹ Ibid., 483.

³¹² Ibid., 24: 359 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 23: 359). "Italics His"

Owen summarises three outstanding characteristics of Christ's prophetic work in heaven with respect to the moral responsibilities of the believer's life.

Firstly, Christ's teaching reaches the human heart. For this reason, Christ requires "the *renovation of our whole souls*, in all their faculties, motions, and actings, into the image of God."³¹³ With respect to this, for Owen, human teaching can not restore the image and likeness of God. Much of this teaching is obscure and partial, but Christ's teaching for universal obedience in all the duties of it is "*absolute, every way complete and perfect*."³¹⁴ So, every precept of Christ is equally certain, and infallibly declarative.³¹⁵

Secondly, Christ's teaching is extensive. "There is nothing in any kind pleasing to God, comfortable to his *mind*, or compliant with his *will*, but he *requires* it; nothing *crooked*, or *perverse*, or *displeasing* to God, but it is *forbidden* by him. It is, therefore, a *perfect rule* of holiness and obedience."³¹⁶

Lastly, Christ's teaching is marked by "*clearness, perspicuity, and evidence of divine*

³¹³ Ibid., 3: 633. "Italics His"

³¹⁴ Ibid., 633. "Italics His"

³¹⁵ Ibid., 635. "Italics His"

³¹⁶ Ibid., 633. "Italics His"

truth and authority".³¹⁷

Given the above, Owen affirms that "the great end of the prophetic office of Christ, in the revelation he made of the will of God in the Scriptures, in his personal ministry, and in the dispensation of his word and Spirit continued in the Church, is our holiness and obedience unto God."³¹⁸

3.2.2 The Priestly Work

Concerning the high priestly work of Christ in heaven Owen declares as follows:

The Lord Christ entered into heaven, the place of the residence of the glory of God, as into a *temple*, a tabernacle, a place of sacred worship. He did so as the high priest of the church, Heb. ix. 24. He 'is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' He is entered into heaven, as it was figured by the tabernacle of old... In this temple, this sanctuary, the Lord Christ continueth gloriously to *minister before the throne of grace*, in the discharge of his office... As the high priest went into the holy place to minister for the church unto God, before the ark and mercy-seat, which were types of the throne of grace; so doth our High

³¹⁷ Ibid. "Italics His"

³¹⁸ Ibid., 637.

Priest act for us in the real presence of God.³¹⁹

For Owen, Christ “did not enter the holy place only to reside there in a way of glory, but to do temple work”.³²⁰ What then is the work? Owen replies:

In general; herein Christ exerteth and exerciseth all his *love, compassion, pity, and care* towards the church, and every member of it. This are we frequently called unto the consideration of, as the foundation of all our consolation, as the fountain of all our obedience... Thoughts hereof are the relief of believers in all their distresses and temptations; and the effects of it are all their supplies of grace, enabling them to persevere in their obedience. He doth appear for them as the great representative of the church, to transact all their affairs with God.³²¹

At this point, Owen goes on to assert that in the High priestly work of Christ there are three special purposes:

First, to make effectual the atonement that he hath made for sin. By the continual representation of it, and of himself as a “Lamb that had been slain,” he procures the application of the virtues and benefits of it, in

³¹⁹ Ibid., 1: 253. “Italics His”

³²⁰ Ibid., 253-254.

³²¹ Ibid., 254. “Italics His”

reconciliation and peace with God, unto their souls and consciences. Hence are all believers sprinkled and washed with his blood in all generations, - in the application of the virtues of it unto them, as shed for them. *Secondly, to undertake their protection,* and to plead their cause against all the accusations of Satan. He yet accuseth and chargeth them before God; but Christ is their advocate at the throne of grace, effectually frustrating all his attempts, Rev.xii.10; Zech.iii.2. Thirdly, to *intercede* for them, as unto the communication of all grace and glory, all supplies of the Spirit, the accomplishment of all the promises of the covenant towards them, 1 John ii. 1, 2. This is the work of Christ in heaven.³²²

In fact, for Owen, Christ's intercession has two aspects namely, "vocal" and "real".³²³

The vocal intercession occurs "when any one, by words, arguments, supplications, with humble earnestness in their use, prevails with another for any good thing that is in his power to be bestowed on himself or others."³²⁴ In which case, Owen affirms that:

Of this nature was the intercession of Christ whilst he was on the earth. He dealt with God, by prayers, and supplications, sometimes with cries and tears, with respect unto himself in the work he had undertaken, but

³²² Ibid. "Italics His"

³²³ Ibid., 10: 184.

³²⁴ Ibid., 19: 197 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 18: 197).

principally for the church of his elect, Heb. v. 7; John xvii. This was his intercession as a priest whilst he was on the earth, namely, his interposition with God, by prayers and supplications, suited unto the state wherein he was, for the application of the benefits of his mediation unto the church, or the accomplishment of promises made unto him upon his undertaking the work of redemption.³²⁵

Concerning the *real* intercession Owen argues that:

now, in heaven, the state and condition of Christ admitting of no oral or formal supplications, and the ground, reason, or argument of his intercession, being finished and past, his intercession, as the means of the actual impetration of grace and glory, consists in the real presentation of his offering and sacrifice for the procuring of the actual communication of the fruits thereof unto them for whom he so offered himself. The whole matter of words, prayers, and supplications, yea, of internal conceptions of the mind formed into prayers, is but accidental unto intercession, attending the state and condition of him that intercedes.³²⁶

In Owen's mind the fact that the intercession is real rather than vocal is an argument for the inseparable conjunction between intercession and oblation.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

The *nature* of the intercession of Christ will also prove no less than what we assert, requiring an inseparable conjunction between it and its oblation: for as it is now perfected in heaven, it is not a humble dejection of himself, with cries, tears, and supplications; nay, it cannot be conceived to be *vocal*, by the way of entreaty, but merely *real*, by the presentation of himself, sprinkled with the blood of covenant, before the throne of grace in our behalf... His intercession there is an appearing for us in heaven in the presence of God, a demonstration of his sacred body, wherein for us he suffered... our Saviour's being with his own blood, so presenting himself that his former oblation might have its perpetual efficacy, until the many sons given unto him are brought to glory. And herein his intercession consisteth, being nothing, as it were, but his oblation continued.³²⁷

The perpetual union between the oblation and the real intercession is extremely important to Owen's understanding of the work of Christ, functioning as an essential stone in the foundation of the doctrine of sanctification because the saint's sanctification purchased by virtue of Christ's oblation on earth is applied to them by virtue of Christ's supplications in his intercession on heaven.³²⁸ As he states:

³²⁷ Ibid., 10: 184. "Italics His"

³²⁸ Ibid., 3: 506.

he (Christ) prevails for the *actual sanctification* of our natures, in the *communication* of holiness unto us, by his *intercession*... Nothing belongs to this holiness but what, in the actual communication of it, is a peculiar fruit of Christ's intercession; what is not so, what men may be made partakers of upon any more general account, belongs not therunto... We are not to pray unto him that he would intercede for us that we may be sanctified; for as he needs not our minding for the discharge of his office, so he intercedes not orally in heaven at all, and always doth so virtually, by his appearance in the presence of God, with the virtue of his oblation or sacrifices.³²⁹

3.2.3 The Kingly Work

We can now turn to consider Owen's view of Christ's exercise of his kingly office in heaven.

Having demonstrated that Lordship and possession were designed for Jesus Christ, Owen asserts that:

The grant (Lordship and possession) was made to him upon *his resurrection*...All was sealed and ratified *when he took possession of his throne at the right hand of the Father*; by all which he was made and declared to be Lord and Christ... And such weight doth the Scripture lay

³²⁹ Ibid., 506-507. "Italics His"

upon this glorious investiture of Christ in his inheritance, that it speaks of his whole power as then first granted unto him... and the reason of it is, because he had then actually performed that work and duty upon the consideration whereof that power and authority were eternally designed and originally granted unto him. God's actual committing all power over all things and persons in heaven and earth, to be exerted and managed for the ends of his mediation, declaring this act, grant, and delegation by his resurrection, ascension, and sitting at his right hand.³³⁰

For Owen, the foundation of the authority of Christ over the elect is his divine status as their creator and Lord.³³¹ Moreover, Christ has been granted by the Father a lordship over them on account of his mediatorial office from eternity within the formulation of the covenant of the redemption.³³² "His grant is strengthened by *redemption*, purchase, and acquisition."³³³ The mediatorial lordship of Christ over and his possession of all the elects is "the fruit of the covenant of the mediator (redemption) proceeding from *his especial and greatest love*...and being accompanied with *purchase* for them which they

³³⁰ Ibid., 20: 45 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 19: 45). "Italics Mine"

³³¹ Ibid., 56.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid. "Italics His"

shall certainly enjoy, and that of grace of glory.”³³⁴ So, Owen affirms that the primary issue with regard to the death of Christ is not “its extent, but its efficacy and fruits in respect of them for whom he died”³³⁵ In particular, the elect are divided into called and uncalled. The called have been actually called by faith to Christ and union with Christ. Hence, Owen affirms that:

He (Christ) stands toward them in *all relations* of authority: is their father, master, elder brother, teacher, king, lord, ruler, judge, husband; ruling in them by his Spirit and grace, over them by his laws in his word, preserving them by his power, chastening them in his care and love, feeding them out of his stores, trying them and delivering them in his wisdom, bearing with their miscarriages in his patience, and taking them for his portion, lot, and inheritance, in his providence; raising them at the last day, taking them to himself in glory, and every way avouching them to be his, and himself to be their Lord and Master.³³⁶

For Owen, the uncalled also are under the lordship of Christ because “they are already

³³⁴ Ibid. “Italics His”

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid., 57. “Italics His”

his sheep by grant and purchase, though not yet really so by grace and holiness".³³⁷

In Owen's practical divinity, Christ's work of mediatorial kingship consists in his distributing all that is included in the category of grace. By grace Owen means:

All that which comes under the name of *grace* in Scripture, which, flowing from the free and special love of God, tends directly to the spiritual and eternal good of them on whom it is bestowed, may be referred unto four heads; for as the fountain of all these (or the gracious free purpose of the will of God, from whence they all do flow), being antecedent to the mission of Christ the mediator, and immanent in God, it can be no otherwise granted unto him but in respect of its effects.³³⁸

What grace for sovereign disposal does Christ as the mediatorial king have? Owen replies:

All *pardonning grace*, for the acceptance of our persons and forgiveness of our sins, is his; he is the Lord of it. Act v. 31, He is made 'a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins'. Forgiveness of sins is wholly given unto him as to the administration of it, nor doth any one receive it but out of his stores...All *regenerating*, quickening, sanctifying, assisting grace is his. [1.] John v.21, He quickeneth whom he pleaseth. He

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid., 59. "Italics His"

walks among dead souls, and says to whom he will, 'Live.' And, [2.] He sanctifies by his Spirit whom he pleaseth, John iv. 14. All the living waters of saving grace are committed to him, and he invites men unto them freely, Cant. V.1; Isa.iv.1; Rev.xxii.17. And, [3.] All grace actually assisting us unto any duty is his also, for without him we can do nothing, John xv. 5; for it is he alone that gives out suitable help in the time of need, Heb. iv. 16. No man was ever quickened, purified, or strengthened, but by him; nor can any dram of this grace be obtained but out of his treasures... The grace of our *preservation* in our acceptance with God and obedience unto him is solely his, John x. 28. And so also, - Are all the blessed and *gracious privileges* whereof we are made partakers in our adoption, John i.12.³³⁹

Given the above, Owen affirms that although the treasure of grace was given into Christ's hand before His incarnation to communicate to all saints, yet it was only purchased by Christ's mediatorial work on earth. After Christ's mediatorial work, according to the sovereign and eternal designation of all saints, Christ gave out to them the mass of the treasure.³⁴⁰ Thus, it is fair to say that all sanctifying grace is given to the saint because of Christ's right, following his admission to the regal office.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Ibid., 60-61. "Italics His"

³⁴⁰ Ibid. 61-63.

³⁴¹ See *ibid.*, 3: 414, 518-519, 13: 23.

Here, what we must not miss is that union with Christ is the foundation of all the benefits of the saint's sanctification.³⁴² That is to say, in the union of believers with Christ his sanctifying grace is given to them. Indeed, as stated earlier, this union between Christ and the saint takes place through the Holy Spirit in effectual calling.³⁴³ The Holy Spirit himself is sent as a result of Christ's mediatorial work in heaven.³⁴⁴ Christ unites the saint to himself by the Spirit.

This background in Owen's thought concerning the union of the saints with Christ through the Holy Spirit prepares us for discussing his theology of the subjective aspect of sanctification in the covenant of grace.

3.3 Conclusion

Owen's concept of the covenant of redemption provides us with a basis for understanding the transaction between the Father and the Son as distinct persons. The incarnation is held to arise out of the covenant. That is to say, the effective or material

³⁴² Ibid., 21: 149-152 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 149-152).

³⁴³ Ibid., 3: 516-522, 5: 131, 11: 336-338. See also Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 35.

³⁴⁴ Owen, *Works*, 3: 183-188.

cause of the incarnation is God as Trinity. In this sense, Owen argues that according to the principle that *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, the incarnation as an outward act of the divine nature involved every person of the Trinity: the Father as unto authoritative designation by sending his Son; the Holy Spirit as unto the formation of the human nature; and the Son as unto the assumption, since he himself took on human nature.

Affirming both the Son's proper work within the Triune God's common work for the incarnation, and the incarnate Christ as truly human, Owen continually keeps the incarnate Christ's proper work on earth within the context of the Triune God's common work; and in this light the completed aspect of sanctification is interpreted. The completed sanctification is secured by the person and the work of Christ on earth.

Owen understands Christ's oblation to include not only his self-offering on earth, but also his ongoing intercession in heaven. The unity of oblation and intercession provides a key to understanding the progressive aspect of sanctification in Owen's thought.

In heaven, Christ's mediatorial work as prophet, king, and high priest serves as the framework for the progressive aspect of sanctification. Moreover, the Holy Spirit himself is sent as a result of Christ's mediatorial work in heaven. As a result, the saint is united to Christ by the Spirit's proper work. This takes place within the framework of

the covenant of grace.

Chapter 4

The Subjective Aspect of Sanctification in the Covenant of Grace

While acknowledging the full divinity and independent subsistence of the Holy Spirit, Owen asserts that the procession of the Holy Spirit is the crucial point of differentiation between the Spirit and the other persons of the Trinity. When addressing the procession of the Spirit, Owen indicates a twofold procession of the Spirit: “1. Φοδιχη, or ουστοιχη, in respect of *substance* and personality; 2. Οικονομικη or *dispensatory*, in respect of the work of grace.”³⁴⁵ So, in Owen’s thought the term “procession” is drawn from this text as descriptive both of the eternal, *ad intra* life and of the temporal, *ad extra* activity of the Spirit. Moreover, within the formulation of the covenant of redemption the temporal, *ad extra* procession of the Spirit must be involved in an undivided or common work of all persons in the Trinity. However, it ensures a special operation of the Holy Spirit.³⁴⁶

With respect to the context of the overall Trinitarian economy of salvation the operation

³⁴⁵ Owen, *Works*, 2: 226. “Italics His”

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 3: 198-199.

of the Holy Spirit conforms to the pattern described in general in the discussion of the works of the Godhead *ad extra*: there is an undivided work of the Godhead in which the persons have appropriate tasks, manifesting not only the unity of God's work but the distinction of persons and the exercise of their personal properties. Furthermore, one of the most important proper works of the Holy Spirit is to bring sinners into union with Christ and keep them there, thus, bringing about the individual application of the covenant of redemption within the context of the covenant of grace.³⁴⁷

4.1 Definitive Sanctification by the Holy Spirit's Proper Work within the Triune God's Common Work

For Owen, unregenerate man experiences darkness (in the mind), depravity (in the will) and death (in the soul) due to the effects of sin.³⁴⁸ For this reason, Owen affirms that "there is a necessity of an *internal, powerful, effectual work of the Holy Ghost on the*

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 11:336-338, 3: 516-527. See also Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 145-148.

³⁴⁸ Owen, *Works*, 3:242-282. See Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 45-56; Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: The Problem of Sin in the Writings of John Owen*, 59-93.

souls of men, to deliver them out of this state and condition by regeneration."³⁴⁹ In this sense, Owen affirms that regeneration is a "peculiar work of the Holy Spirit" within Triune God's common work.³⁵⁰

In contrast to the Rome Catholic Church, Owen asserts that, "regeneration doth not consist in a participation of the ordinance of *baptism* and a profession of the doctrine of *repentance*."³⁵¹ Owen, also, strongly opposes the Socinian idea that, regeneration consists in a moral reformation of life and conversation.³⁵² Although Owen accepts the moral reformation of life in regeneration, this moral life is not regeneration. The reason is that, regeneration "doth not consist in *a new course of actings*, but in renewed faculties, with *new dispositions, power, or ability*"³⁵³ to man and for man. Furthermore, Owen repudiated the Arminians³⁵⁴ and the Enthusiasts.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁹ Owen, *Works*, 3: 282. "Italics His"

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 207. Cf. Owen uses the term 'regeneration' and 'conversion' interchangeably.

See Owen, *Works*, 3: 9, 330; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 37.

³⁵¹ Owen, *Works*, 3: 207. "Italics His"

³⁵² Ibid., 219.

³⁵³ Ibid., 221.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 316-317.

For Owen, in the process of our regeneration, the proper work of the Holy Spirit is suited to the nature of the faculties of the saint- mind, will and affections.³⁵⁶ So all faculties (e.g., mind, will, affection) in the saint are radically renewed to prepare, fit, and enable him to the duties of holiness, according to the mind of God.³⁵⁷ That is to say, the saint has new power to perform all the duties of obedience in his renewed rational faculties.³⁵⁸ As noted at chapter 1, this new power in the saint is called the "*supernatural habit*,

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 224-225. According to Packer, the enthusiasts held that... the Spirit works in the saints immediately, going beyond Scripture both in revelation of truth and in direct impulses to action. Man's duty, therefore, was to forego religious routine and to wait passively before God until the Spirit spoke. He must not tie himself to the means, for the Spirit was now working above and without means, see Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the thought of Richard Baxter*, 324.

³⁵⁶ Cf. In Owen's *ordo salutis*, regeneration follows illumination, conviction and reformation of life: Owen, *Works*, 3: 231-242.

³⁵⁷ Owen, *Works*, 3: 468-527.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 493-498.

principle and disposition of living unto God".³⁵⁹ Elsewhere, Owen identifies the supernatural principle or habit of holiness with "new creature", "new dispositions", "new power", "new ability", "divine principle", "habitual grace", and "the *imago Dei*".³⁶⁰ This principle plays an essential role in the saint's sanctification. Owen compares it to the seed of a plant, which is planted in the earth and grows.³⁶¹ The Holy Spirit is seen as the water supplied for its growth.³⁶²

Concerning the supernatural principle of spiritual light and life in each rational faculty (e.g., mind, will, affections), Owen has three comments to make. (i) It is by this principle

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 469. "Italics His" Thomas Goodwin also uses the concept of the principle of holiness, and the supernatural principle of life, see Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Vol.6), 29, 189, (Vol. 7), 131-132.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 221, 469; 2:172, 199-200; 11: 97-98; 1: 149,154,168. This new principle applies naturally to Owen's faculty schema: "In the understanding, it is light; in the will, obedience; in the affection, love; in all, faith", see Owen, *Works*, 2: 172 cited from Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 63.

³⁶¹ Owen, *Works*, 3: 388.

³⁶² Ibid., 393.

that the saint has union with Christ. (ii) This gracious principle is the root of his likeness and conformity to God. (iii) This principle is the dynamic of the saint's spiritual life by which he is enabled to live for God because the *imago Dei* is renewed in his rational faculties (e.g., mind, will, affections).³⁶³

Moreover, the principle becomes the root of all other gospel graces such as faith, love, joy and hope, which are the result of the operating of the principle.³⁶⁴

In the light of the argument concerning the concept of the new principle of life, it is important to grasp that in Owen's thought, sin's dominion over the saint is fully dethroned by the powerful acting of grace in him, and that sin will not have dominion over him, and that sin cannot have ultimate victory over him.³⁶⁵

4.1.1 The Dominion of Sin

What then is the dominion of sin? In Owen's thought, it means that sin always seeks to

³⁶³ Ibid., 478, 330, 493-496; 2: 200, 206.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 2: 172, 199-200.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 7: 508-510, 542.

use its power for the eternal ruin of those over whom it rules.³⁶⁶ Besides, it is a ‘usurped’ dominion because sin has no right in men, nor do men have the right to allow its rule in terms of which all men have originally another lord, to whom they owe all obedience.³⁶⁷ Owen goes on to point out that all people have a right in themselves to cast off the rule of sin on the ground that their natural allegiance is still owed to God. But they have neither the power to exercise this right nor the willingness to do so except for divine grace, since their natural mind is at enmity with God.³⁶⁸ “God may even resort to abandoning men to this predicament. It is but righteous judgment when men continue their practice of known sin, ignoring the warnings of God and despising his word; when they relinquish their share in the means of grace, and take pleasure in deliberately associating with others who enjoy the profane treatment of Christian people.”³⁶⁹

In addition, according to Owen, the dominion of sin is defined as more than a mere influence in the life of man. That is, its character is represented as a ‘law’ due to the fact that “where it (sin) hath dominion, it hath the force and power in the wills and minds of

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 508-510.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 509.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 126. See Owen, *Works*, 7: 510-512.

them in whom it is.”³⁷⁰ Accordingly, in Owen’s theology, “the consent of the individual’s will is involved in the dominion of sin, and this leads to the total domination of the life of man by sin.”³⁷¹ Sin also works through reward and punishment, for the pleasures of sin are its reward.³⁷²

4.1.2 Sin’s Dominion Ended

How then does Owen demonstrate that sin does not have dominion over the saint?

His answer is that the sole ground of the saint’s freedom from sin’s dominion is the death of Jesus Christ, who took the curse of the law upon himself at the cross, and his perfect obedience to the law all his life.³⁷³

In particular, Owen affirms that the end of sin’s dominion is not a matter of the law, but of grace.³⁷⁴ There are four reasons for this.

First of all, the law gives no strength against sin to unbelievers who are under sin, but

³⁷⁰ Owen, *Works*, 7: 512.

³⁷¹ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 126. See Owen, *Works*, 7: 512-513.

³⁷² Owen, *Works*, 6: 164-165.

³⁷³ Ibid., 11: 295.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 7: 542.

grace does.³⁷⁵ That is to say, "sin will neither be cast down nor kept out of its throne, but by a spiritual power and strength in the soul to oppose, conquer, and dethrone it."³⁷⁶ "The law is holy, but it cannot make the unbeliever holy who has made himself unholy,"³⁷⁷ because the law was never intended by God to convey spiritual strength unto the souls of men.³⁷⁸ However, Owen stresses that all the sins of the believer are expiated or done away with by grace in the blood of Christ. As a result, the dominion of sin, which consists in its condemning power, is brought to an end.³⁷⁹

Secondly, the law gives no liberty of any kind. But the saint is translated by grace into a state of glorious liberty, for Jesus Christ makes him free.³⁸⁰

Thirdly, the law does not supply us with effectual motives and encouragements to bring about the end of the dominion of sin as part of the saint's duty. Hence those who engage themselves in opposition to sin, or a relinquishment its service, based merely on the

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 544.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 543.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 545.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 549.

motives of the law, quickly faint and give over.³⁸¹ But the motives and encouragements given by grace to bring about the utter ruin of sin in the way of duty are life, cheerfulness, courage, and perseverance. So the saint is encouraged in his work and duty because he has completely partaken of the love of God and of Christ, and from the ready assistance of the Holy Spirit. As a result, when the saint's soul is under the influence of temptations or surprises, 'they [the saints] will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.' (Isaiah 41:31).³⁸² Thus, because sin's power to condemn men is rooted in the law, human freedom from the law means their freedom from sin's dominion. Finally, Christ is not in the law, He is "not proposed in it, nor communicated by it."³⁸³ The saints are "not made partakers of him thereby."³⁸⁴ Yet he alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is enacted in the rule of sin.³⁸⁵

In addition, the Holy Spirit is the only principal efficient cause of the ruin of the

³⁸¹ Ibid., 550.

³⁸² Ibid., 551.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

dominion of sin because by him the saint not only is united unto Christ, (Gal 3:2)³⁸⁶ but also by him all grace is communicated to the saint from Christ in the union.³⁸⁷

In this sense, Owen affirms that “the immediate efficient *cause* of all gospel holiness is the *Spirit of God*.”³⁸⁸

Given the above, it is clear that at the moment when the saint is united to Christ he is no longer ruled by sin’s dominion because he is not under law, but under grace. That is to say, union with Christ destroys union with sin. Thus, Owen’s approach to the ruin of the dominion of sin firmly stands within the formulation of the union of the saint with Christ where the saint is reckoned to have done in and with Christ whatever Christ accomplished in his redemptive work by the proper work of the Holy Spirit. As Owen affirms:

Because being in him, and members of him, *we* are accounted to have done, *in him* and *with him*, whatsoever *he* hath done *for us*: We are ‘dead with him,’ Rom. vi.8; ‘buried with him,’ verse 4; ‘quickened together with him,’ Eph. ii.5; ‘risen with him.’ Col.iii.1; being ‘raised up,’ we ‘sit

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 3: 518-522.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 523. “Italics His”

together with him in heavenly places,' Eph. ii.6... By virtue of this union there is such an analogy between that which Christ *hath done for us* ...and what he *worketh in us* by his Holy Spirit.³⁸⁹

Moreover, although "regeneration is the head, foundation, or beginning of our (the saint's) sanctification"³⁹⁰ since it gives a desire to abandon the propensities for living under the rule of sin, and to eliminate all desires and pretences of sin for its power,³⁹¹ yet the end of sin's dominion in him, not only by being freed from the law's condemnation, but also by being placed under the rule of grace, takes place at the moment when he is mystically united with Christ thorough "his faith"³⁹² which is granted by the Holy

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 13: 23. "Italics His"

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 3: 299.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 493- 499.

³⁹² Ibid., 1: 486. So, Owen believes that regeneration is causally prior to faith, by which the saint is united to Christ. As a result, he makes a decisive and irreverible break with sin in union with Christ. See also M. W. Mason, "The Significance of the Systematic and Polemic Function of Union with Christ in John Owen's contribution to seventeenth Century Debates Concern Eternal Justification", 60-62.

Spirit's proper work.³⁹³ Hence, it could be called definitive sanctification, since a saint is absolved, acquitted, freed from the rule of sin, at the moment when he is united to Christ. Owen also appears to refer to definitive sanctification in the following, though not utilizing the terminology:

Whereas it is *effectual vocation* that is intended, wherein a holy principle of spiritual life, or faith itself, is communicated unto us, our *sanctification* radically, and as the effect in its adequate immediate cause, is contained in it... And in many other places is *sanctification* included in *vocation*.³⁹⁴

However, for Owen, although sin has been dethroned, the presence of sin remains as a ferociously powerful foe, not between the distinct faculties of the soul itself as in the natural, but between contrary habits and inclinations in the same mind, will and affections.³⁹⁵ As a result, there is spiritual warfare in the saint.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Ibid., 3:516-522.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 5: 131. "Italics His"

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 3: 488.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 488-489.

There is, therefore, good reason for believing that, for Owen, the author of the saint's definitive sanctification is the Triune God. The Father was in Christ reconciling the world to him, destroying the enmity that had entered by sin, and laying the foundation of the eternal peace within the formulation of the covenant of redemption. After that, the Son executed the Father's requirements. The proper work of the Holy Spirit applies it to all believers who are united with Christ within the context of the covenant of grace. So definitive sanctification can be described as an immediate work of God that has been done through the Holy Spirit to give his saint victory against sin's dominion, which is done by means of Jesus Christ.

The saint's freedom from the dominion of sin provides a key to understanding Owen's teaching on the dynamic equilibrium between divine grace and human duty in the covenant of grace.³⁹⁷

The promises of the new covenant... as unto the communication of the grace of conversion and sanctification unto the elect... are absolutely free and unconditionate. But, the promises which respect the growth, degrees, and measures of this grace in believers are not so. There are many duties required of us, that these promises may be accomplished

³⁹⁷

Ibid., 7: 560.

toward us and in us; yea, watchful diligence in universal gospel obedience is expected from us unto this end... if you are negligent in due improvement of the grace which we have received, and the discharge of the duties required of us, we may fall into decays, and be kept in a low, unthrifty state all our days.³⁹⁸

Such an argument leads us directly to the theme of Owen's view of progressive sanctification.

4.2. Progressive Sanctification by the Holy Spirit's Proper Work within the Triune God's Common Work

According to Owen, God communicates his grace to his people continually through union with Christ within the context of the progressive process of a saint's sanctification.³⁹⁹ So "union with Christ is the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations"⁴⁰⁰ on the analogy of the relationship between the head and

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 1: 441. See John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace In Puritan Thought*, 53-85.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 3: 414.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 21: 146 (Banner of Truth reprint edition 20: 146).

members in one body, husband and wife, and a tree and its branches.⁴⁰¹ In this respect,

Owen declares:

He is the head of all the saints; and he is the *living* head, and so a living head as that he tells us that 'because he liveth we shall live also,' John xiv. 19... In him is the fountain of our life; which is therefore said to be 'hid with him in God,' Col. iii. 3. And this life he gives unto his saints by quickening of them by his Spirit, Rom. viii. 11; and he continues it unto them by the supplies of living grace which he communicates unto them.... His treasures of grace are unsearchable; his stores inexhaustible; his life, the foundation of ours, full, and eternal; his heart bounteous and large; his hand open and liberal: so that there is no doubt but that he communicates supplies of grace for their increase in holiness abundantly unto all his saints.⁴⁰²

One of the main spiritual enjoyments and expectations is that the saint can have communion directly with the Father, Son, and Spirit through union with Christ.⁴⁰³

Thomas Goodwin makes a similar statement:

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 11: 339-341.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 6:286-287. "Italics His"

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 2:9.

there is communion and fellowship with all the persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and their love, severally and distinctly... And in believing, a man's heart is drawn out to believe in God the Father; that is, look what is said of God the Father's love, and concerning his giving Christ, and choosing men to life, and in this his election regarding neither sin in them nor good(for free grace in properly the Father's), a man hath support from all such considerations, and he believeth in God, but whilst he doth so his heart it may be is not so distinctly drawn out to Jesus Christ at that time; so it is in assurance: sometimes a man's communion and converse is with the one, sometimes with the other; sometimes with the Father, then with the Son, and then with the Holy Ghost; sometimes his heart is drawn out to consider the Father's love in choosing, and then the love of Christ in redeeming, and so the love of the Holy Ghost, that searcheth the deep things of God, and revealeth them to us, and taketh all the pains with us; and so a man goes from one witness to another distinctly.⁴⁰⁴

For Owen, union with Christ is the ground of all communions: Our communion with God "consisteth in his *communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him* of that which he requireth and accepted, flowing from that *union* which in Jesus Christ we

⁴⁰⁴

Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Vol.8), 376-379.

have with him.”⁴⁰⁵ That is to say, God’s communication of Himself to the saints is first, and union with Christ is the result, and human response is the desired consequence. So, although union and communion are related, yet one cannot have the latter without the former. Thus, union precedes communion. Believers united to Christ are enabled and encouraged to commune with God.

4.2.1 Communion with God

For Owen, communion relates 1) to things and persons, 2) to a state and condition, or 3) to actions whether good or evil.⁴⁰⁶ In other words, Communion with God contains both the relationship between God and the saint and the fellowship between them.⁴⁰⁷ So, it should be noted that God begins God’s communication of Himself to the saint, and his response to Him is second. And while not forgetting the distinctive aspect of communion with God, Owen holds the principle that the *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, in his dealing with the theme of communion.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Owen, *Works*, 2: 8-9. “Italics His”

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 18, 269.

Given the above Owen applies his understanding concerning communion with God in more detail.

4.2.1.1 Communion with the Father

For Owen, the basic foundation of the saint's communion with the Father is His love, which is not denying the Son's and the Holy Spirit's love, but that he ought to think specifically of the Father, without taking away from them. The reason is that, as noted earlier:

a divine person is nothing but the *divine essence, upon the account of an especial property, subsisting in an especial manner...* each person having the understanding, the will, and power of God, becomes a distinct principle of operation; and yet all their actings *ad extra* being the actings of God, they are *undivided*, and are all the works of one, of the self-same God.⁴⁰⁹

The Father's love as the great foundation and spring of all communications of the grace of God is not limited, nor liable to increase or decrease, nor based on whim, but is "eternal," "unchangeable," "immutable," and "infinitely gracious."⁴¹⁰ The Father's love

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 407. "Italics His"

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 2: 19-20, 23, 29, 30, 36.

is "plainly distinguished from the Holy Ghost, who sheds abroad that love of his."⁴¹¹

The Father is "also distinguished from the Son, for it is from that love of his that the Son is sent."⁴¹² In this context Owen argues that the saint's communion with the Father

begins in His love as one of bounty, and ends in his love to Him as one of gratitude.⁴¹³

The saint's love to the Father includes "rest, delight, reverence, and obedience."⁴¹⁴

Furthermore, the Father's love is antecedent, and immutable, so the Father's love encourages the saint to respond to Him. The saint's love is consequent, and mutable.⁴¹⁵

Moreover, by means of faith the saint is able to practice communion with the Father in love.⁴¹⁶

4.2.1.2 Communion with the Son

As for the Son, Owen asserts that the basic foundation of the saint's communion with the

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 27-28.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 29-31.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 32-34.

Son is His grace. Yet, Owen does not deny the Father and Holy Spirit's grace, as befits the dictum '*opera ad extra sunt indivisa*'.⁴¹⁷

In the course of his analysis of the Song of Solomon, Owen identifies three things in the personal excellence and grace of Christ. The first thing is His fitness to save, through the grace of union, and the proper necessary effects. This aspect includes the Son's assumption of His human body, the idea of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and the hypostatical union.⁴¹⁸ The second thing is His fullness to save, from the grace of communion; or the free consequences of the grace of union.⁴¹⁹ This aspect includes the idea of the *communicatio gratiarum* in the hypostatical union endowing Christ to fulfil his office of mediation.⁴²⁰ The third thing is "His *excellency* to endear, from his *complete suitableness* to all the wants of the souls of men."⁴²¹

In dealing with the grace of Christ within the terms of the Chalcedonian formula, Owen indicates how the saint should hold immediate communion with Him in four ways.

⁴¹⁷ See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 213.

⁴¹⁸ Owen, *Works*, 2: 51

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 51-52.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 52. "Italics His"

Firstly, one may consider the constitution of the person of Christ. At this point Owen highlights three aspects. The first is Christ's Deity, in which there is "the *endless, bottomless, boundless grace and compassion.*"⁴²² And, "It is not the grace of a *creature*, nor all the grace that can possibly at once dwell in a created nature, that will serve our turn."⁴²³ The second aspect is Christ's humanity, which is characterized by "freedom from sin, and fullness of grace."⁴²⁴ The third aspect is Christ's divinity and humanity in one person.⁴²⁵ Jesus' divine and human natures are united in one person, in which there is an endless, bottomless fountain of grace for the saint. It is due to this that he is fit as a mediator to suffer, to bear whatever was due to us.⁴²⁶

Secondly, the saint should hold immediate communion with Christ in all true knowledge and wisdom, including 1) the *knowledge of God*, 2) *of ourselves*, and 3) knowledge of

⁴²² Ibid., 61. "Italics His"

⁴²³ Ibid. "Italics His"

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 63-66.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 66-67.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 67-69.

how to walk in *communion* with God.⁴²⁷

Thirdly, the saint should hold immediate communion with Christ in His affection. This consists in four things: - delight, valuation, pity, or compassion and bounty.⁴²⁸ "When believers realize how Christ graciously gives himself and his love, they naturally give and love in return - thus the communion is a genuine reciprocity, even though it is grounded in and secured by divine action."⁴²⁹

Finally, the saint should hold immediate communion with Christ in His purchased grace. This purchased grace means the benefits flowing to the saint through Christ's work as a mediator, which includes his obedience, his suffering of death, and his continued

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 80. "Italics His" The knowledge and wisdom contain God's love, pardoning mercy, grace, righteousness, judgment, wisdom, patience, forbearance, human sin, Christ's righteousness, satisfaction, reconciliation, death, resurrection, see Owen, *Works*, II: 79-113.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 118. For further study, see Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 181-186.

⁴²⁹ Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 182. See Owen, *Works*, 2: 118, 132.

heavenly intercession.⁴³⁰ The grace is subdivided into three graces, namely, grace of justification, grace of sanctification and grace of privilege (adoption), which are purchased at the price of the blood of Jesus and come to be received and enjoyed by the saint.⁴³¹

As for the grace of sanctification, Owen refers to both negative and positive aspects. The former includes the habitual cleansing of the saint's nature, removing the pollutions of all his actual transgressions, and mortification of sin.⁴³² The latter includes the indwelling Spirit in the saint, habitual grace, and the actual influence for the performance of every spiritual duty.⁴³³

Owen pictures the overflowing grace relating to the saint's sanctification moving from Father through the Son and the Spirit, within the covenant of redemption.⁴³⁴ Through Christ's interceding with the Father, Christ would bestow the Holy Spirit on the saints:

⁴³⁰ Owen, *Works*, 2: 154-168.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 155.

⁴³² Ibid., 171. See also Owen, *Works*, 3: 422-467.

⁴³³ Ibid., 172. See also Owen, *Works*, 3: 468-527.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 198-199.

what Christ asketh the Father as mediator to bestow on us (the saints), that is part of his purchase, being promised unto him, upon his undertaking to do the will of God. And this is the first thing that is to be considered in the Lord Jesus, as to the communication of the Spirit of sanctification and purification, the first thing to be considered in this our communion with him, - he *intercedes* with his Father, that he may be bestowed on us as a fruit of his death and bloodshed in our behalf. This is the relation of the Spirit of holiness, as bestowed on us, unto the mediation of Christ.⁴³⁵

So Christ's "prayer being granted, as the Father 'hears him always'... He sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts; which is the efficient cause of all holiness and sanctification, - quickening, enlightening, purifying the souls of his saints" in the covenant of grace.⁴³⁶

4.2.1.3 Communion with the Spirit

As for communion with the Holy Spirit, working from within a covenant framework which extends into eternity, Owen argues that the basic foundation of the saint's

⁴³⁵ Ibid. "Italics His"

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 199.

communion with the Holy Spirit lies in the nature of His mission.⁴³⁷ The Holy Spirit in his role as the comforter brings Christ's teaching.⁴³⁸ His work is to glorify Christ, and to shed the love of God abroad in the saint's heart.⁴³⁹ He, who came as comforter, indwells in, seals, anoints the saint, and is earnest unto him.⁴⁴⁰

For Owen, the Holy Spirit permanently dwells in the saint as Sanctifier ever since he became a Christian. Owen summarises this under the three terms, *unction*, *sealing* and *earnest*.

First, believers have their *unction* immediately from Christ: "this anointing with the Holy Ghost is the communication of him unto us (the saints) with respect unto that gracious work of his in the spiritual, saving illumination of our minds, teaching us to know the truth, and to adhere firmly unto it in love and obedience."⁴⁴¹

The *sealing* of the Spirit also indicates the communication of Him to the saint.⁴⁴² "All

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 222.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 236-238.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 240.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 242-243.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 394.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 405. "Italics Mine"

our spiritual privileges, as they are immediately communicated unto us by Christ, so they consist wholly in a participation of that head, spring, and fullness of them which is in him; and as they proceed from our union with him, so their principal end is conformity unto him."⁴⁴³

For Owen, an *earnest* is "part of the price of any thing, or part of any grant, given beforehand to assure the person to whom it is given that at the appointed season he shall receive the whole that is promise him."⁴⁴⁴ So the earnest of the Holy Spirit is the promise of eternal life. To confirm this to the believer, God gives him his Spirit.⁴⁴⁵

Hence, "in the giving of his Spirit unto us, God making of us co-heirs with Christ, we have the greatest and most assured earnest and pledge of our future inheritance."⁴⁴⁶

Other consequences of communion with the Spirit include consolation, peace, and joy.⁴⁴⁷

In the saint's communion with the Holy Spirit, Owen observes the necessity of the saint's obedience. The saint is not to grieve the Holy Spirit. The saint is not to quench

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 2: 244.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 4: 411.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 2: 250-253.

His activity: He is like a fire to be kept alive. And the saint is not to resist the Holy Spirit in terms of Christ's ordinances.⁴⁴⁸

Given the above background, it is clear that the saint's communion with God includes a mutual relationship in dynamic equilibrium between his response and God's grace. Moreover, this understanding of how the saint responds to the triune God illuminates Owen's argument that the saint is being transformed into the image of God.⁴⁴⁹

Owen states that "the Holy Ghost communicates unto us his own likeness; which is also the image of the Father and the Son. 'We are changed into this image by the Lord the Spirit,' 2 Cor. iii. 18; and herein he brings us into fellowship with himself."⁴⁵⁰ This image of God is represented to the saint in Christ through the Gospel.⁴⁵¹ So,

our apostle declares 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' That which is proposed unto us is, the 'glory of God,' or the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 264-265.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 3: 511-512, 572-591.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 2: 243.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 1: 171-172.

Christ,' chap. iv. 6; that is, God gloriously manifesting himself in the person of Christ... And the effect hereof is, that we are, through the operation of the Spirit of God, 'changed into the same image,' or made holy and therein like unto him.⁴⁵²

This reflects that the objective aspect sanctification is essential to the imitation of Christ.

4.2.2 Indwelling Sin

At this point, as stated above, what we must not miss is that the renewal of the image of God in a saint can be deeply affected by his indwelling sin, because he is still in sin's presence and influence, although indwelling sin no longer has authority, since he has been united with Christ.⁴⁵³

Owen deals with this issue in his treatise entitled *The Nature, Power, Deceit and*

⁴⁵² Ibid., 3: 511-512.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 6: 182, 187, 192, 229, 280-282, 300-302; 3: 573-579 ; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 130-145. See also Kacic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, 45-64, Kacic, "Communion with God by John Owen (1616-1683)", *The Devoted Life: An invitation to the Puritan classics*, 169.

*Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers.*⁴⁵⁴ The treatise is based on Rom. 7:21: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."⁴⁵⁵ Owen draws from the Pauline teaching three themes⁴⁵⁶: indwelling sin as a law,⁴⁵⁷ sin as

⁴⁵⁴ Owen, *Works*, 6: 157-322. See also Owen, *Works*, 6(Vol) - *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, Of Temptation, and* 7(Vol) - *On the Dominion of Sin and Grace*.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 6: 157.

⁴⁵⁶ Yoon suggests two categories of the remnant of indwelling sin – passive and active. On the one hand passive, those who under the power of the law are usually weakened and wearied by it, while on the other hand active, indwelling sin has a tendency to work in the heart of men very actively and powerfully pursuing opposition against God, see Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 195-206.

⁴⁵⁷ Owen, *Works*, 4: 163-171; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 131-132; Will Timmins, "John Owen and the Problem of indwelling Sin." *Puritans & Spiritual Life*, 30-31; Randall C. Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality, Studies in Church History*, 114-116.

enmity against God⁴⁵⁸ and indwelling sin as a pattern of activity.⁴⁵⁹

In particular, Owen stresses that there are two patterns in the activity of indwelling sin, namely, the power of indwelling sin and the deceit of indwelling sin.⁴⁶⁰

Concerning the power of indwelling sin, Owen stresses, first of all, that the power of indwelling sin in the saint is revealed by an aversion to, and loathing of, communion

⁴⁵⁸ Owen, *Works*, 4: 176-178; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 132-133; Timmins, "John Owen and the Problem of Indwelling Sin." *Puritans & Spiritual Life*, 32-33; Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality, Studies in Church History*, 116.

⁴⁵⁹ Owen, *Works*, 4: 182-322. Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 133-135; Timmins, "John Owen and the Problem of Indwelling Sin." *Puritans & Spiritual Life*, 33-36.

⁴⁶⁰ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 133-145; Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality, Studies in Church History*, 116-119; Timmins, "John Owen and the Problem of indwelling Sin." *Puritans & Spiritual Life*, 33-36; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 198-206.

with God.⁴⁶¹ It is opposed to God as light is to darkness, heat to cold, virtue to vice, or sin to grace,⁴⁶² and shows itself as lust (Gal 5:16), rebelliousness (Rom 7:23), and madness (Jer 2:24, Hos 8:9).⁴⁶³ Interestingly, for Owen, aversion is also found regarding both public and private duties.⁴⁶⁴ So, in order to keep the soul from sin's influence, Owen suggests several "frames", namely, a heart fixed upon God, labouring to prevent the beginning of the workings of aversion and thus forestall sin's negotiations, and the cultivating of humility and contrition.⁴⁶⁵

Indwelling sin in the saint is also deceitful. The Bible speaks in several places of the deceitfulness of sin⁴⁶⁶ and frequently sounds the warning, 'Do not be deceived'.⁴⁶⁷ The

⁴⁶¹ Owen, *Works*, 4:182; Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality, Studies in Church History*, 115-116.

⁴⁶² Owen, *Works*, 4: 189.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 189-210; Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality, Studies in Church History*, 116.

⁴⁶⁴ Owen, *Works*, 4: 183-185.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 185-188.

⁴⁶⁶ Heb. 3:13; Eph. 4:22; I Tim. 2:13-14.

⁴⁶⁷ Lk. 21:8; I Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; Eph. 5:6.

way, manner and progress of the deceitfulness of indwelling sin is fully expressed in James 1:14-15.⁴⁶⁸ Here, Owen notices that “the utmost end aimed at in all the actings of sin, or its tendency in its own nature, and that is *death*.”⁴⁶⁹ Besides, “the general way of its acting towards that end is by *temptation*: ‘Every man is tempted by his own lust.’”⁴⁷⁰ Using the passage in James 1:14-15, Owen analyzes the whole pattern of sinful deceit, concerning which he enumerates five stages.⁴⁷¹ Firstly, sin draws the mind away from attending to the course of obedience and holiness, particularly meditation and prayer, and encourages the abuse of grace.⁴⁷² For Owen, meditation and prayer are very important for the Christian not only to discover the

⁴⁶⁸ Owen, *Works*, 6: 214.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 215. “Italics His”

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. “Italics His”

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 215-216; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 134-138.

⁴⁷² Owen, *Works*, 6: 216; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 134-135; Yoon, “The Significance of John Owen’s Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity”, 201-202.

hidden presence and work of sin, but also to counter its deceitfulness.⁴⁷³ So, if the believer's spiritual duties become weak, sin not only diverts the mind by emphasizing cheap grace (Rom. 6:1-2),⁴⁷⁴ but also, deceives the mind with regard to its dangers, and the need for constant watchfulness.⁴⁷⁵

Secondly, "when the *mind* is drawn from its duty, the *affections* are enticed".⁴⁷⁶ The deceit of sin draws the mind off its watch, by proposing sin as desirable, and by hiding the consequence of sin.⁴⁷⁷

Thirdly, indwelling sin not only deceives and entices, but also conceives. That is, when sin has drawn "the mind off from its duty, and entangled the affections", sin gains the consent of the will.⁴⁷⁸ For, according to Owen, "every sin is so voluntary, that if it be not

⁴⁷³ Owen, *Works*, 6: 226. Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 134-135.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 218

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁴⁷⁶ Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 135. "Italics Ferguson's"

⁴⁷⁷ Owen, *Works*, 6: 247-249; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 202-203.

⁴⁷⁸ Owen, *Works*, 6:251

voluntary it is not sin."⁴⁷⁹

Fourthly, once sin solicits the will's consent, actual sin will ensue.⁴⁸⁰ There are two things needed for this: the power to commit sin, and the perseverance of the will in its purpose to sin, until the sin has been committed.⁴⁸¹

Fifthly, and finally, sin is demonstrated by actual sin in the lives of professing Christians.⁴⁸² Owen observes that this situation existed, "not of the *lowest form* or ordinary sort of believers, but of men that had a peculiar eminency in them on account of their walking with God in their generation. Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were not men of an ordinary size, but higher than their brethren, by the

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 252; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 135-136.

⁴⁸⁰ Owen, *Works*, 6: 261; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 136; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 204.

⁴⁸¹ Owen, *Works*, 6: 261; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity," 204.

⁴⁸² Owen, *Works*, 6: 279; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 137-138; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 205.

shoulders and upwards, in profession, yea, in real holiness.”⁴⁸³ Hence, it is significant that these men received great and wonderful mercies from the hand of God, before sin invaded their lives, but they failed to remain diligent and watchful, and consequently, only God in His faithfulness kept them from utter loss and ruin.⁴⁸⁴

In particular, Owen points out that sin often causes a gradual decline in zeal and holiness. In the light of this warning, Owen suggests three tests to determine the extent of one’s own declensions: evaluate our zeal for God, examine our delight in the worship of God, and inspect our sensitivity to sin.⁴⁸⁵

This argument sheds light on Owen’s view of mortification of sin. John Flavel also points out to believers the necessity of mortification in terms of “the inconsistency and the contrariety... betwixt Christ (who is in them) and unmortified lust”.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸³ Owen, *Works*, 6: 279. “Italics His”; Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 137.

⁴⁸⁴ Owen, *Works*, 6: 280-281.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 282-284; Yoon, “The Significance of John Owen’s Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity”, 205.

⁴⁸⁶ John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (Vol. 2), 375.

There is a threefold inconsistency betwixt Christ and such corruptions; they are contrary to the *holiness of Christ*, 1 John iii.6. 'Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him'; i.e. whosoever is thus ingulphed and plunged into the lust of the flesh, can have no communion with the pure and holy Christ; but there is also an inconsistency betwixt such sin and the *honor of Christ*... and unmortified lusts are also contrary to the *dominion* and government of *Christ*, Luke ix.23. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me:' These are the self-denying terms upon which all men are admitted into Christ's service: And without mortification and self-denial, he allows no man to call him Lord and Master.⁴⁸⁷

4.2.2.1 Mortification of Sin

The foundation of the work of mortification, according to Owen, lies in the words of the apostle in Rom. 8:13, 'if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live'.⁴⁸⁸ The following five points should be noted, Owen says:⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 375. "Italics His"

⁴⁸⁸ Stephen Charnock analyses Rom. 8:13 in two aspects - a threatening and a promise.

Within the promise there is the condition and the reward. In the condition, 1. The act: mortify. 2.

A condition is stated: 'if'

A subject is denoted: 'ye' (believers)

A means is identified: 'through the Spirit.'

A duty is prescribed: 'mortify the deeds of the body.'

A promise is given: 'ye shall live.'

The first point, the conditional 'if', stands out as especially crucial. According to Owen, conditionals in such propositions denote two things: First, they imply the uncertainty of the events promised, for the condition is absolutely necessary for what follows. Second, they suggest the certainty, coherence and connection between the things mentioned.⁴⁹⁰ For example, a Doctor promises a sick patient, 'if you take this prescription you will regain your health.'⁴⁹¹ Hence, Owen asserts that a doctor implies the certainty of the

The object: the deeds of the body. 3. The agents: ye and the Spirit. Secondly, in the reward, 1. Heaven is a place for conquerors only. 2. The more perfect our mortification, the clearer our assurance of glory. 3. Mortification is a sure sign of saving grace, see Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (Vol. 5), 214-216.

⁴⁸⁹ Owen, *Works*, 6: 5-6.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

connection between the remedy and health, when he makes such a conditional statement.

However, for Owen, such a connection in Romans 8:13, is not related to cause and effect, but between means and end. Why? Because eternal life is given to all saints through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:23), and God has in fact appointed the 'means' of mortification through the Spirit to 'achieve' the end.⁴⁹²

Next, the subject to whom this duty is prescribed. According to Owen, the subject of mortification is 'ye' (the believer).⁴⁹³ So the choicest saints who seek to remain free from the condemning power of sin need to make it their business, as long as they live, to mortify the indwelling power of sin.⁴⁹⁴ On that point, it is not implausible that mortification is the outworking of the saint's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. In other words, mortifying sin is to be understood as a process of being sanctified by the believer's labors.⁴⁹⁵ Hence, there is no mortification of indwelling sin without the idea of definitive sanctification in Owen's thought. Why then did God not

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 9-16.

just glorify the saints at the point of definitive sanctification? According to Owen,

The continuance of sin in us shall be the ground, reason, and occasion, of the exercise of all grace, and of putting a lustre on our obedience.

Some excellent graces, as repentance and mortification, could have no exercise if it were otherwise; and whilst we are in this world, there is a beauty in them that is an overbalance for the evil of the remainders of sin. And the difficulty which is hereby put on our obedience, calling continually for the exercise and improvement of all grace, renders it the more valuable. Herein lies the spring of humility and self-resignation to the will of God. This makes us love and long for the enjoyment of Christ, putting an excellency on his mediation.⁴⁹⁶

Third, the Holy Spirit is the principal means to accomplish this duty. So for Owen, without the Holy Spirit all other ways of discipline are in vain, while all other 'helps' leave us 'helpless'.⁴⁹⁷ Owen rejects the Roman Catholic idea of mortification:

(this) consists in mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretence of their rough garments, whereby they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground; they are all for the

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 7: 556-557. "Italics His"

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 6: 7.

mortifying of sin. Their preaching, sermons, and books of devotion, they
look all this way.⁴⁹⁸

Hence, all the work of mortification without the Spirit is useless. In this connection,
Thomas Manton also maintains the vanity of mens' endeavour apart from the work of the

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 16-17. Owen makes a distinction between spiritual principle and actual grace.

"The Spirit dwells in us as a free agent in a holy habitation (spiritual principle). This grace, as a
quality, remains in us, as in its own proper subject that hath not any subsistence but therein, and
is capable of being inteded or restrained under great variety of degrees. Actual grace is an
illapse of divine influence and assistance, working in and by the soul any spiritual act or duty
whatsoever, without any pre-existence unto that act or continuance after it, God working in us,
both to will and to do. But this habitual grace is always resident in us, causing the soul to be a
meet principle for all those holy and spiritual operations which by actual grace are to be
performed", see Owen, *Works*, 2: 200-201. Thus, for Owen, the actual grace is the Holy Spirit's
work in and with the saint; so that His assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the
work of mortification, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself, see Owen, *Works*, 3: 20.

Holy Spirit:

After conversion, and the Spirit's becoming a spirit of light, life, and love to us; after grace is put into our hearts to weaken sin, still we need the help of the Spirit. Partly, because habitual grace is a created thing; and the same grace that made us new creatures, is necessary to continue us so. For no creature can be good independently, without the influence of the prime good; all things depend in *esse, conservare, operari*, on him that made them... Partly, because in the very heart there is great opposition against it; there is flesh still, the warring law, Rom.vii. 23, *Gratia non totaliter satiat*; the cure is not total as yet, but partial; therefore they need the Spirit to guide, and quicken, and strengthen them... We cannot, without the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body.⁴⁹⁹

What, then, is the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of mortification to the believer?

According to Owen,

1. He alone *clearly* and *fully* convinces the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the corruption, lust, or sin to be mortified... 2. The Spirit alone reveals unto us *the fullness of Christ* for our relief... 3. The Spirit alone *establishes* the heart in expectation of relief from Christ... 4. The Spirit alone brings the *cross* of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing

⁴⁹⁹

Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Vol. 12), 76. "Italics His"

power... 5. The Spirit is the author and finisher of our *sanctification*...

6. In all the soul's addresses to God in this condition, it hath *supportment* from the Spirit.⁵⁰⁰

From this we quickly learn that the Holy Spirit carries on the actual work of mortification by applying the death of Christ to the saint.⁵⁰¹ As a result, communion with God in Christ leads to the killing of sin and lust.⁵⁰²

So communion with God in Christ is the indispensable means of mortification. The more the believer is in genuine and ongoing fellowship with the Triune God, the better killing work is affected in him. Hence, Owen's discussions of mortification takes place under the umbrella of communion with God.

Fourth, the duty of discipline is to mortify the deeds of the body. This raises three questions: What is meant by the term "body"? What are "the deeds of the body"? And, what is meant by the term "mortify"?⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Owen, *Works*, 6: 85-86. "Italics His"

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 3: 560-561.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 7: 528.

⁵⁰³ Ibid. 6: 7.

The body, according to Owen, embodies the corruption and depravity of our sinful natures. The deeds of the body are described in Galatians 5:19 as “the works of the flesh”, and must literally be put to death. Owen believes that “the deeds of body are the starting point of all temptation and sin.”⁵⁰⁴ So Owen stresses that “the apostle calls them *deeds*, as that which every lust tends unto; though it do but conceive and prove abortive, it aims to bring forth a perfect sin.”⁵⁰⁵ For Owen, the term ‘mortify’ is described “as a metaphorical expression, taken from the putting of any living thing to death.”⁵⁰⁶ On this point, Owen indicates that mortification, as described by Paul, is a duty incumbent on all believers:

*the mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the words or deeds of the flesh is the constant duty of believers.*⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Yoon, “The Significance of John Owen’s Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity”, 176.

⁵⁰⁵ Owen, *Works*, 6: 8. “Italics IIis”

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 8, 3: 540.

⁵⁰⁷ Owen, *Works*, 6: 8. “Italics IIis” See also Ferguson, *John Owen on The Christian Life*, 146-147.

From this it should be noted that although mortification is performed by the Holy Spirit, it remains a saint's duty to mortify sin. That is to say, our consideration of mortification as a grace, carried on and accomplished by the Holy Spirit, should be the principal motive to mortification as a duty. Hence, Owen affirms that:

in every duty two things are principally considered, - first, The *life* and *spring* of it, as it is wrought in us by grace; secondly, the *principal reason* for it and motive unto it, as it is to be performed in ourselves by the way of *duty*; both these, as to this matter of *mortification*, do centre in this *inhabitation* of the Spirit. For, -(1st.) It is he who *mortifies* and *subdues* our corruptions, who quickens us unto life, holiness, and obedience, as he "dwelleth in us," that he may make and prepare a habitation meet for himself. And, (2dly.) The principal reason and motive which we have to attend unto it with all care and diligence as a *duty* is, that we may thereby preserve His *dwelling-place* so as becometh his grace and holiness.⁵⁰⁸

Lastly, note the promise given - 'ye shall live'. God promises us life, in contrast to the threat of death by the flesh. Although this promise of life does not intend eternal life, because the saint already has eternal life in Christ, yet his vigour, power, joy and

⁵⁰⁸

Owen, *Works*, 3: 550. " Italics His"

comfort of our spiritual lives depends upon the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.⁵⁰⁹

4.2.2.2 Two Possible rules and principles for Mortification of Sin

After defining mortification, Owen suggests two possible rules and principles that are necessary to mortify of sin.

First of all, only those who are engrafted into Christ can mortify their indwelling sins. In other words, "*unless a man be a believer... he can never mortify any one sin.*"⁵¹⁰ For Owen, mortification is not the present duty of unregenerate men. God calls them to conversion first. He calls them to the conversion of their whole soul, not just the mortification of this or that particular lust.⁵¹¹ "Unless a man be *regenerate*, unless he be a believer, all attempts that he can make for mortification, be they never so specious and promising, - all means he can use, let him follow them with never so much diligence,

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 4: 8-9. See also Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Vol.12), 82-

91; Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (Vol.5), 214-215.

⁵¹⁰ Owen, *Works*, 4: 33. "Italics His"

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 35.

earnestness, watchfulness, and intention of mind and spirit, - are to no purpose."⁵¹² On that point, Owen directs, "*Be sure to get an interest in Christ; if you intend to mortify any sin without it, it will never be done.*"⁵¹³

Owen suggests that two instruments to mortify sin are living faith and love of Christ. Faith has a peculiar efficacy for subduing sin, because God's grace is communicated to the saint by the actual exercise of faith principally.⁵¹⁴ It is the greatest madness for anyone to seek to accomplish mortification of sin without using faith.⁵¹⁵ In the exercise of faith by fervent prayer, the habit, frame, and inclinations of the soul unto universal holiness, with a detestation of all sin, are increased, cherished, and strengthened.⁵¹⁶ And the saint must exercise mortification by love: "We do it by *love*. Christ as crucified is the great object of our love, or should so be; for he is therein unto sinners 'altogether lovely.'" ⁵¹⁷ For Owen, the effects of mortification by love are adherence and

⁵¹² Ibid., 35-36. "*Italics His*"

⁵¹³ Ibid., 38. "*Italics His*"

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 3: 562-563.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 4: 37-38.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 3: 560.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 563. "*Italics His*"

assimilation or conformity.⁵¹⁸ Christ is beheld by the eyes of faith, as the proper object of sincere love. The soul of the believer cleaves to Christ crucified, so as to be in some sense always present with him on the cross, and hence ensues adherence and assimilation or conformity. It is in the nature of love to beget a likeness between the mind loving, and the object beloved. A mind filled with the love of Christ as crucified, will be changed into into its image and likeness, by the effectual mortification of sin.⁵¹⁹ In short, communion with Christ on the cross in love leads to the killing of sin.

At this point, we must bear in mind that to mortify sin is not the total destruction of the sinful nature in Owen's thought, for that will not occur until glorification.⁵²⁰ Owen argues that there may doubtless be times of wonderful success by the Spirit and grace of Christ, and such a great victory that the saint may have almost constant triumph over it; but the utter killing and destruction of sin, he cannot expect in this life.⁵²¹ Such an argument is opposite to John Wesley's perfectionism. In general, Wesley distinguished three stages in sanctification, namely, sanctification at the new birth, Christian

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 564.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 6: 24-25.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 25.

perfection, and absolute perfection.⁵²² So, for Wesley, sanctification occurs from the time of regeneration in the saint:

From the time of our being 'born again,' the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled 'by the Spirit' to 'mortify the deeds of the body' (Rom 8:11, 13), of the evil nature, and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God.⁵²³

However, Wesley recognized that the new birth cannot bring complete freedom from habitual sin, because indwelling sin persists in the saint, even though great changes begin to occur in the life of the saint when he is born again.⁵²⁴ His life is still lived in relation to two contrary principles, namely, nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17, Rom 7:14-25).⁵²⁵ At this point, Wesley insists that full sanctification is full deliverance from sin, which means entire sanctification in the sense of freedom from evil

⁵²² Howard Marshall, "Sanctification in the teaching of John Wesley and John Calvin", 78-79.

⁵²³ John Wesley, *John Wesley*, 275.

⁵²⁴ Wesley, *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works*, 174.

⁵²⁵ Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, 143.

thoughts and evil tempers. How then can the saint enter into this higher-life? For Wesley, it is not by the saint's works, but faith. Sangster explains:

the infusion of love into the soul of the believer and the consequent expulsion of sin, is the gift of God in answer to faith, and happens in a moment.⁵²⁶

So, in Wesley's opinion, full sanctification is a miracle of grace and a work of God mightily performed in a moment in the believing heart. As a result, the perfectly sanctified man is delivered not only from the power of sin – this happen at new birth – but also from the root of sin as the source of inward and outward sins. That is to say, the saint is also delivered from original sin.⁵²⁷ The distinction between new birth and entire sanctification followed from Wesley's experience in Aldersgate Street in 1738.⁵²⁸ By contrast, Owen states that "mortify...your members which are upon the earth" means "*Be always doing it whilst your members live in this world.*"⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ W. E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, p.82.

⁵²⁷ Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, 144-145.

⁵²⁸ Wesley, *The Works of the REV. John Wesley, A. M.* (Vol.1), 83-147.

⁵²⁹ Owen, *Works*, 6: 175. "Italics Mine"

Meanwhile, Owen's second rule and principle for mortification of sin is that sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience is necessary.⁵³⁰ Two very important implications follow from such an argument. One is that mortification will not succeed if a saint ignores the use of positive means of grace in constant communion with God, such as reading, prayer, and meditation.⁵³¹ The other implication is that mortification must be motivated by hatred of sin. This "lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification."⁵³² For Owen, Israel drew near to God with much diligence and earnestness, with fasting and prayer. But God rejected it all. They attended diligently to fasting and prayer, but in others they were negligent and careless.⁵³³

For Owen, these attempts to mortify sin from a corrupt principle from 'self-love', will not mortify sin. Owen asserts that God often allows this troubling lust, other negligence and lukewarmness in walking before Him. This troubling will lead to walking fully with

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 40-41.

⁵³² Ibid., 41.

⁵³³ Ibid., 41-42.

God. And God often suffers a particular sin to chasten the saint's other negligences.⁵³⁴

In this regard, Owen stresses the need for sincerity and diligence in order to mortify sin:

He (the saint), then, that would really, thoroughly, and acceptably mortify any disquieting lust, let him take care to be equally diligent in all parts of obedience, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God, though but one is so to him. Whilst there abides a treachery in the heart to indulge to any negligence in not pressing universally to all perfection in obedience, the soul is *weak*, as not giving faith its whole work; and *selfish*, as considering more the trouble of sin than the filth and guilt of it; and lives under a constant *provocation* of God: so that it may not expect any comfortable issue in any spiritual duty that it doth undertake, much less in this under consideration, which requires another principle and frame of spirit for its accomplishment.⁵³⁵

Hence, in Owen's thought mortification is both a grace and duty. This argument strikes at the very heart of seventeenth-century Antinomians' misunderstanding of mortification.

There were two reasons for their misunderstanding of it.

First of all, it is because the Antinomians, as noted in chapter 1, misconstrued

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 43.

regeneration not as the renewal of human faculties, but as the coexistence side-by-side of the old man and the new created man (a supernatural being).⁵³⁶ And thus the work of mortifying is apparently nothing more than the motions of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in them.⁵³⁷ On that point, the Antinomians affirm that:

Sanctification is by the Spirit only, as we understand it of its operations by mortification, or quickning these our mortal bodies, yet is it not so in us, as mingled with uncleanness; but as distinct absolutely from the flesh; and being another, or a new nature, yea a participation of Divine nature, 2. Pet. I. 3, 4. which though it make up one person, yet is it none at all of the old man; not of the old creation, but it is that new creation; that new heart, and that Spirit of God which is bestowed upon us.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 357-358, 34-36. These Antinomians belong to the inherentist strain, see chapter I.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 358.

⁵³⁸ John Traske, *The True Gospel Vindicated, from the Reproach of a New Gospel* (1636), 21-23 cited from Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, 358. In this connection, the Antinomians argue that we are not to pray against all sinne, because the old man is in us, and must be, and why should we pray against that which cannot be avoided?, see Hall, *The Antinomian controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 227.

Hence, mortification is described not as the believer's struggle to eradicate indwelling sin, but as the Spirit's counteraction against the old man. The believer in the work of mortification is but an instrument used by the Spirit.

These standpoints seem to anticipate the modern Keswick's doctrine of sanctification, despite some divergences.⁵³⁹ Keswick leaders such as F. B. Meyer, Evan H. Hopkins, Steven Barabas, and John. B. Figgis denied that the Spirit works through man's exercise of his own rational faculties, because regeneration does not renew the faculties of

⁵³⁹ The Keswick movement helps saints to overcome self-righteousness by emphasizing the role of faith in both justification and sanctification. After regeneration, conflict with sin in the saint's life becomes the main focus, and is a realistic problem for all to deal with. It can be appreciated that the Keswick movement focuses on the victory against sin, achieved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the ideal of Christianity is set in terms of goals such as unbroken joy and tranquility in the saint's life without pain. Not surprisingly, the Keswick movement has been "a bourgeois, well-heeled affair and white-collar. Consequently, the goal is self-centered rather than God or neighbour centered, see Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 148-149. See also Dieter, *Five Views on Sanctification*; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain- A History From The 1730s To 1980s*, 151-180, Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England*, 73-90.

understanding, will, affections and memory.⁵⁴⁰ In order to have victory over his conscious sin, the saint has to invoke faith to use the Holy Spirit's power.⁵⁴¹ In the Spirit's sanctifying work mortification is understood not to purge from sin, but rather as an overwhelming power to deliver the saint from indwelling sin.⁵⁴² Regarding this point, Packer affirms that "the Spirit's work of repelling the assaults of sin in my heart is thus vicarious in exactly the same sense as was Christ's work of bearing the penalty of sin on His Cross."⁵⁴³ As a result, they reject the saint's conflict, effort, and endeavor along the path of sanctification, believing instead that God is as willing to give holiness, as He is to grant salvation. At this point, the movement takes up the slogan, "Let go and let God".⁵⁴⁴ Over against the Antinomians' and (by implication) Keswick's misunderstanding of the doctrine of mortification, Owen's argument is as follows:

⁵⁴⁰ Packer, "Keswick and Sanctification", 160.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 162-165.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁴⁴ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 155-157; Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity", 305-306.

The *manner* of the actual operation of the *Spirit* of God in effecting this work, or *how* he *mortifies* sin, or enables us to mortify it, is to be considered...The Holy Ghost doth, - by *implanting* in our minds and all their faculties *a contrary habit and principle*, with contrary inclinations, dispositions, and actings, - namely, a principle of *spiritual* life and holiness, bringing forth the fruits thereof. By means hereof is this work effected; for sin will no otherwise die but by being killed and slain. And whereas this is gradually to be done, it must be by warring and conflict. There must be something in us that is contrary unto it, which, opposing it, conflicting with it, doth insensibly and by degrees (for it dies not at once) work out its ruin and destruction. As in a chronical distemper, the disease continually combats and conflicts with the powers of nature, until, having insensibly improved them, it prevails unto its is it dissolution, so is it in this matter. ... The Holy Ghost carrieth on this work in us as a *grace*, and enableth us unto it as our *duty*, by those *actual supplies* and *assistance* of *grace* which He continually communicates us... That we endeavour diligently, in the whole course of our lives, after these continual supplies of *grace*, - that is, that we wait for them in all those ways and means whereby they are communicated; for although the Lord Christ giveth them out freely and bountifully, yet our diligence in duty will give the measure of receiving them. If we are negligent in prayer, meditation, reading, hearing of the word, and other

ordinances of divine worship, we have no ground to expect any great supplies to this end.⁵⁴⁵

In this respect, Owen affirms that the Holy Spirit “works *in us* and *with us*, not *against us* or *without us*; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.”⁵⁴⁶

The second reason for the Antinomians’ misunderstanding of mortification of sin is that “they made justification into sanctification.”⁵⁴⁷ In other words, “from the forensic language of justification, they made inferences about the spiritual condition of those who are justified; from the premise of the believer’s perfect standing, they drew the conclusion of the believer’s perfect state.”⁵⁴⁸ In this sense, Kevan asserts that “nothing is left in the believer but ‘the feeling of sin’, although this obliteration of sin from before God does not mean that the believer will not still see his sin, for God has power not to

⁵⁴⁵ Owen, *Works*, 3: 551-554. “Italics His”

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 6: 20. “Italics His”

⁵⁴⁷ Ernest. F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology*, 99. These Antinomians belong to the imputative strain, see chapter 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 97.

see, what he leaves the believer still able to see.”⁵⁴⁹ Thus, the Antinomians considered mortification of sin to be a needless exercise in futility because God does not see their sins.

By contrast, Owen holds that:

Still there abideth the *true nature of sin* in every in conformity unto or transgression of the law in justified persons, which stands in need of daily actual pardon. For there is “no man that liveth and sinneth not;” and “if we say that we have no sin, we do but deceive ourselves.”⁵⁵⁰

This is why mortification is the saint’s constant duty.⁵⁵¹

4.2.3 The Bond of Grace and Duty in Progressive Sanctification

For Owen, progressive sanctification involves the immediate work of God by the Holy

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 100-101; John Eaton, *The Honeycombe of Free Justification by Christ alone*, 26, 61. See also Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695*, 116-118.

⁵⁵⁰ Owen, *Works*, 5: 146. “Italics His”

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 6: 10-16.

Spirit, and the fulfilment of the covenant of grace flowing from union with Christ.⁵⁵² At the same time, it contains two main aspects: the restoration of the image of God, and purification from the pollution of sin. That is to say, the process of the saint's sanctification needs both vivification and mortification.⁵⁵³ These two aspects are expounded under the rubric of communion with God. Furthermore, in the saint's communion with God, Owen rightly posits a strong link between divine grace and the saint's duty. It is this mutuality that secures increase of holiness. As Owen asserts:

Although our sanctification and growth in holiness be a work of the Holy Spirit, as the efficient cause thereof, yet is it our own work also in a way of *duty*... if the design of the Holy Ghost... be to carry it on in us, and increase it more and more unto a perfect measure; then is our diligence still to be continued to the same end and purpose: for hereon depend our growth and thriving. It is required of us that we give all diligence unto the increase of grace.⁵⁵⁴

In particular, Owen gives two reasons why the saint's duty is necessary in the process of

⁵⁵² Ibid., 3: 369, 386, 523.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 422-527.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 404-405. "Italics His"

his sanctification. First, because God requires the whole duty from him under the terms of the covenant of grace. Secondly, because God has promised to work holiness in him under the terms of the covenant.⁵⁵⁵

In this connection, Owen affirms that

our duty and God's grace are nowhere opposed in the matter of sanctification, yea, the one doth absolutely suppose the other. Neither can we perform our duty herein without the grace of God; nor does God give us this grace unto any other end than but that we may rightly perform our duty. He that shall deny either that God commands us to be holy in a way of duty, or promise to work holiness in us in a way of grace, may with as much modesty reject the whole Bible. Both these therefore we are to have a due regard unto, if we intend to be holy.⁵⁵⁶

4. 3 Conclusion

The Holy Spirit's proper work is the foundation that implants a principle of spiritual life and holiness, specifically for communion with the Triune God and for the mortification of sin in a saint's mind, will and affections within the context of the union with Christ.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. 384-385.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 384.

The saint can have communion directly with the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation. In doing so, the image of God in the saint is daily renewed. True communion results in the saint's Christ-like transformation. Although indwelling sin no longer has authority, since he has been united with Christ, sin is still the biggest obstruction to true communion between the Triune God and the saint. Hence, mortifying sin should be categorized as a part of sanctification. Although mortification is performed by the Holy Spirit, it remains a saint's duty to mortify sin, because the Holy Spirit works in the saint and with him, not against him or without him. Therefore, mortifying sin is the constant duty of the saint in the world.

In the light of his argument concerning the restoration of the image of God, and the mortification of sin within the context of the saint's communion with the Triune God, Owen offers the following definition of progressive sanctification:

Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God, on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant; by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly: – It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit

*into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.*⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁷

Ibid., 3: 386. "Italics His"

Conclusion

Throughout our study it has become apparent that while Owen's teaching on sanctification is theocentric, this also works hand in hand with his anthropological concerns. Owen achieves this connection primarily through the covenants of redemption and grace.

Concerning the covenant of redemption, while Owen's thought remains clear about God's unity, he sees a distinction in divine operations, not merely in the immanent Trinity, but also in the public works of God, for the saint's sanctification. Owen describes a new kind of subordination and mutual obligation, between the Father and the Son. The Father acquires a new right of headship and authority over the Son by prescribing to the Son what is needed, in order to glorify the Father, through the task of the saint's redemption. Yet the Father is also under a new obligation to enable and provide for the success of the Son's mission. Conversely, the Son, while eternally second in the order of the immanent Trinity, takes on an added dimension, that of being under the Father in the role of mediatorial work for securing sanctification for the saint. The mediatorial work involves Christ's willingness to take flesh, offer himself as a sacrifice, and intercede for the elect. The role of the Holy Spirit within the Triune God is to prepare the human nature of

Christ and assist Christ's oblation and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is subject to Christ as the head of the church; the Spirit brings sinners into union with Christ and keeps them there for their sanctification, thus bringing about the individual application of the covenant of redemption and grace.

According to the personal distinctions of the Triune God in the undivided work *ad extra*, within the covenant of redemption, the perfect representation of God, for Owen, is ultimately found in the incarnate Son. Christ is a representative image of God, not the essential image of God. So the Son's coming in history reveals the immanent relations of the Triune God and discloses how the work for a saint's sanctification is the accomplishment of three divine persons working together. In other words, God not only plans for His people's sanctification in an immanent transaction in accordance with the covenant of redemption, but also as God, procures and applies sanctification in the distinct public works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What is striking about such an analysis is Owen's apparent assumption that the Triune God knowingly discloses Himself throughout history. This is affirmed by the Son's proper work within the Triune God's common work, His incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity are inextricably linked with the concept of revelation in Owen's thought. It is in this light that the aspect of completed sanctification is interpreted.

What is so interesting about the aspect of sanctification within the context of the covenant of redemption is that Christ is not only filled with the fullness of the Godhead in the person of the Son, but also received the Spirit for His earthly life and work. This dual affirmation reflects Owen's firmness about the distinction between the Son as essential image of the Father and the Son as the representative image of the Father.

For Owen, Christ has the essential image of the Father, because He is the same essence as the Father, having the same being, and having the infinitely perfect attributes of the Godhead. On the other hand, Christ reveals the image of God, not immediately by His divine nature, but rather through His humanity, because the essential image is incommunicable to Christ's human nature. Owen describes the revealed image through Christ's humanity as the representative image of God. The representative image, for Owen, implies Christ as fully man, who was continually empowered, comforted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit; this therefore, is the pattern and example of the renewal of the image of God in the believer. Hence, Christ grew physically, mentally, and in experience, as a man, His obedience and faithfulness to God developed correspondingly, and as His natural capacity grew, so He increasingly manifested the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As a boy, He was God's boy; as a youth He was God's youth; as a mature man, He maturely demonstrated what God's grace is able to perform in the life which yields itself entirely

to Him. By the immediate work of the Holy Spirit to sustain Christ's humanity despite its natural infirmities, Christ has done something which enables maturity in the believer's sanctification. The Spirit-empowered human nature of Christ, is the pattern for the renewed image of God in the believer's life. There for all to see, from the womb to the cross, Jesus' earthly life was an historical substantiation of true humanity. Humanity lost in the fall but renewed in Christ, this is the pattern to which the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit will be transformed. Thus, the Holy Spirit's work, which sanctified and renewed Christ's humanity, inevitably brings the believer into the maturity of the likeness of Christ.

For Owen, Christ's role as mediator includes not only His oblation, but also His ongoing intercessory prayer. The purpose of the prayer of the ascended Christ is closely related to the implications of His oblation for the saint's sanctification. Although Christ's oblation and intercession are distinguishable, they function somewhat like two cattle pulling together under one yoke.

The progressive aspect of sanctification is involved in the unity of oblation and intercession, found within the context of Christ's proper work within the Triune God's common work in heaven. In heaven, Christ's mediatorial work as prophet, king and high priest, serves as the framework of the progressive aspect of sanctification which will

continue until He has put down all rule and authority and power, and all His enemies are under His feet.

The Holy Spirit Himself is sent by Christ's intercessional work in heaven; as a result, a saint is united to Christ by the Spirit's proper work. This occurs in accordance with the terms of the covenant of grace. At the moment when the saint is united to Christ, sin's dominion over the saint is fully overthrown by the powerful act of grace within the believer; sin no longer has dominion and can never have the ultimate victory over him. This radical change gives us insight into definitive sanctification by the Holy Spirit's proper work in the Triune God's common work. One of the most important aspects in definitive sanctification is the renewal of the image of God in the saint's rational faculties (mind, affection, and will), despite being both embryonic and progressive. Owen identifies the image of God with the spiritual principle, holiness, and habitual grace. By implanting this principle in the believer, his active participation in the sanctification is ensured.

In the light of Owen's argument concerning the restoration of the image of God, and the mortification of sin, the Holy Spirit's proper work within the Triune God's common work means that through the union of Christ with the saint, the Holy Spirit not only preserves the image of God (spiritual principle), but also gives the saint actual grace for

every duty. In this sense, the saint can have communion directly with the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation. This communion is essential to the imitation of Christ. Wherever Owen states his desire for communion with God, he brings in the saint's duties. In other words, the idea of communion with the Triune God contains the idea of the saint's obligation. So, through the diligent exercise of divinely granted grace, the saint is able to mortify indwelling sin, because his communion with God in Christ brings fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection. Neither can the saint mortify sin without this communion.

The Holy Spirit works in the saint, and with him, within the context of communion with God. To mortify a sin is not to utterly kill sin in this world. So the saint is not perfect, but must be changed by the great power of Christ at the last. Therefore, in Owen's thought a sovereign work of God, and human responsibility, are brought together for the increase of holiness.

How then significant is Owen's understanding of sanctification for the church today?

First, Owen's view of the covenantal structure, defined in terms of Trinitarian relations, deserves further attention. I suppose that one of the reasons Church history presents so few models of sufficient Trinitarian commitment is that the doctrine of the Trinity was originally expressed in rigid theological language, without much regard to the

covenantal arrangements through which the Triune God discloses Himself. As far as I am concerned, this is not a fault of dogmatic statements about the Godhead. Yet, the doctrine of the Trinity still appears with more of the inactive appearance of mere systematic theology. So far it has been suggested that Owen's doctrine of sanctification understands the divine-human relationship according to a pervasively Trinitarian outlook. That is to say, while Owen is theocentric, this works hand-in-hand with his anthropological concerns. In my judgement, essential to Owen's doctrine of sanctification is the confidence that the saint cannot respond to the Triune God without some level of propositional knowledge about His divine essence. Moreover, our knowledge of God is more through his operations and proper effects than from his nature. This is valuable for Christian devotion, because it presses beyond the narrow allowances of the doctrine of salvation to attribute certain redemptive actions to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Owen's elaboration of the themes of the covenant of redemption is particularly profitable because it identifies the divine persons themselves (especially the Father and the Son) as parties to a covenant by which they differently bring about the saint's sanctification. In other words, the covenant provides for Owen the theological backbone of a structure for holiness that is full of clues for the saint seeking to make a more vigorous appropriation of the doctrine of God in his

duties.

Coming much nearer our own time, in contemporary Evangelicalism the focus is on God's movement toward sinners through Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin. This tendency results in an anthropocentric bias, because the vital weight is placed on the saint's response rather than on God's scheme and movement, despite the fact that they intellectually acknowledge that God is Triune. In short, Evangelicalism is essentially man-centred. Human spiritual experience, in sanctification, is dominant. Moreover, God the Holy Trinity is no longer a dominant focus. The reason is that Evangelicalism has little interest in the great Protestant Confessions, and that as a result it is only loosely connected with the core Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

It is also in danger of capitulating to philosophical voices from outside the church. However, for Owen, the boundaries of possibility for the saint's sanctification are based solely upon what has been revealed by the Triune God's covenantal movement. Here is where the redemptive history of God proves its worth as the way for a saint to gain new depths of knowledge; and knowledge that seems particularly relevant to the image of God, involving human faculties that make relations between God and humanity possible.

Owen's treatment of the covenant of redemption with respect to the voluntary role of

divine persons in the Triune God suggests the freeness of God's saving activity as distinct from his necessary attributes. It is important to preserve this. As a result, the saints are astonished by the invitation into the inner-life of divine persons who would not need to love them. In line with this, Owen constantly shows an equal passion for codifying all that God has revealed, and for the godliness that comes from taking revealed truth truly to heart. In short, he is anxious that all that the saints think, say and do should be doxological, glorifying God, and transformational, changing them through the Holy Spirit's power toward ever-increasing Christlikeness, which yet in this life is always patchy, partial, and incomplete. Thus, Owen's view of human cognition through the covenants employed by the Triune God has a vital practical role for the inseparability of knowledge of God and the saint's true piety.

Secondly, Owen's explorations of Christology provide useful tools for a contemporary assessment of how the Christian depends upon the Holy Spirit for his active obedience in the process of sanctification. As a matter of fact, Owen sees Adam in the state of innocence as possessing a knowledge of God which also depended entirely upon God's revelation of himself. Adam could understand God as Creator, Lawgiver, Ruler, and Rewarder only through light given to Him. God required Adam to increase His

knowledge on a daily basis by considering his works. This was then to issue in a response of obedience according to the stipulations of the covenant of works. The point, in Owen's thought, connects very closely to notions of original righteousness in Adam as being made in the image of God. With Adam having broken the covenant of works, human beings are now faced with a significant change in their abilities. In this sense, Owen's understanding of the effects of sin on the divine-human relationship may be seen in its pervasive seriousness. But, Owen himself occasionally took pains to correct any implication that he understood divinity and humanity to be intrinsically opposed. The example is found in the completed aspect of sanctification, especially in the hypostatic union of Christ.

The church has sometimes struggled to maintain the balanced emphasis upon the majesty and mystery of the person of Christ. Sometimes emphasis upon his deity has been at the expense of his humanity. In this sense there can be found no human agency in Christ, his actions are all those of the Logos, performed within the parameters or confines of human possibilities. What is so interesting about Owen's Christology is that it integrates the concepts of Christ as the incarnate Word of God and as the Son inspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, Owen's thought has acknowledged that Jesus as man, filled with the Holy Spirit, is the paradigm of Christian possibilities, the

historical exemplification of what it is to be truly human. Owen seems to believe that it is necessary to take seriously the Biblical portrait of Jesus as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit, and he is able to produce extensive testimony from the Bible that throughout his life it was the Spirit that formed, energised, sanctified comforted, raised and glorified the man Christ. Essential to Owen's belief is the idea that the Spirit-empowered human nature of Christ is the pattern for the renewed image of God in the saint's life. Through the sanctifying work of God we are being changed into his likeness. So, when our whole nature is renovated and renewed by the same grace coming from the work of the Holy Spirit, our imitation of our Exemplar, in whom the gracious effect came to pass as our prototype, is already begun. Hence, the anthropological implications of the incarnation play a significant role in shaping holiness. Holiness is defined as conformity to the moral character of Jesus Christ, who is the representative image of God. The value of Owen's idea is to make Christ more of an active example of how to rely on the Holy Spirit for moral strength, and to offer a great assurance to the saint that Jesus has, in his active obedience to the Holy Spirit, already performed as the perfect model in the saint's sanctification. It is an admirable achievement that Owen manages to draw the close parallel between Jesus and the saint so that Jesus' example could be relevant to the saint's sanctification.

However, in order to achieve his aims, he has to suppress Christ's unique identity, because Owen scarcely discusses the question how Christ's own authority could be compatible with the work of the Holy Spirit. In Christ's life and his mighty works, the deity of Jesus Christ had to be made passive in order to make space for the Holy Spirit working in his humanity. In his scheme, Owen seems to attribute to the Holy Spirit both Jesus' knowledge of his authority and the right to own and exercise that authority. In my judgment, the former can be attributed to the Holy Spirit but the latter, Christ's inherent right, cannot. According to the gospel narratives, Christ cannot be considered merely as a Spirit-inspired man. He spoke and acted with the sovereign authority of God and called people to devote their lives to him as the one who will reward them according to how they have responded to him (Mt. 16:24-27). And when Jesus delegates the power of the Spirit to his disciples, he never invokes the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 10:1). Bearing in mind the increased prominence of the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ after his baptism in Luke, one may argue the possibility of Jesus' progressive growth in his possession of the Spirit's power, and the growth in his knowledge of his Father and in wisdom (Luke 2:49, 2:40, 52) through the work of the Holy Spirit. Even his baptism could be a significant step in carrying out that growth. But, where we disagree with Owen is that, once Jesus is clear about his mission and is

about to embark on the mission, he is continuously dependent on the Spirit's encouragement for his authority. Even though the Holy Spirit plays a vital part in the progressive development of his knowledge of his exclusive identity as the Son of God, his knowledge of his mission and his knowledge of his unique authority, once his inherent identity as the Son of God is known, this identity is by no means dependent on the Holy Spirit's inspiration. So, Christ's sovereign authority to speak and perform mighty works cannot be attributed only to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But there are other areas, such as in Christ's obedient life, which could belong to the work of the Holy Spirit in his humanity. Given the above, it is clear that even though the prominence and immediacy of the Holy Spirit in Owen's understanding of Christ's earthly life is able to generate a correlation between the action of the Spirit upon Christ and the action of the Spirit upon the saint, one of the fundamental problems of Owen's theology is that Christ's sole characteristics are neatly made passive in order to make a space for exercising the power of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, evaluation of quasi-mechanical approaches to devotion and sanctification would benefit from interaction with Owen's view.

In the light of his anthroposensitivity and his rejection of any divorce between the

doctrines of God and humans, or between dogmatics and ethics, Owen's unique quality is that he turns any mechanical directions for the saint's sanctification into an actual spiritual exercise. Generally, puritan devotional manuals were organized topically: meditation on the misery of sin, on death, on reconciliation with God in Christ, on heaven; meditation and prayer for morning, evening, and at mealtime in families and privately; preparatory devotions for receiving the Lord's Supper; Sabbath day devotions; prayers for the sick; and so on. The Puritan devotional manual provided that all believers might engage in regular meditation and prayer while pursuing their secular calling. Owen's understanding of the new principle of holiness in the saint, as was noted at chapter 4, implies a new "engine" for the saint's devotion, because each of his rational faculties (mind, affection, and will) is restored and now works in submission to God. In other words, standing on the Holy Spirit's proper work, the principle is not a mere intellectual assent to a teaching, but is also a power that acts like a tonic to strengthen the saint. Thus, in Owen's theology, the notion of the new principle of holiness leaves behind all ethical externalism and mechanical piety, all Pharisaic formalism and living by numbers, and all ideas of religion as essentially routine performances.

In contemporary Evangelical spirituality Pentecostalism's two-level, two-stage view of

the Christian life (a view that goes back through the 20th century holiness movements), and the power-for-service accounts of Spirit baptism that intertwined with John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection have the tendency to think of justification as a lower level of spiritual existence that is outgrown and left behind once the higher stage is reached. Groups that follow this thinking try to upstage each other by emphasizing their distinctives and demonstrating the deficiencies of the others. The Evangelical tradition seems to regard the order of salvation as a chronological rather than a logical order. As a result, sanctification represents a "higher stage" than justification. Perhaps this tendency is a special temptation for Christians to make their emphasis on the cognitive a refuge from the higher level of spiritual existence which floods their hearts with the experience of the full assurance of the acceptance with which God receives them into his favour as righteous men. For Owen, sanctification, as was noted at chapter 4, is referred to as both definitive and progressive. Definitive sanctification occurs at the moment when the saint is united to Christ by his faith, which is the result of the operating of the principle of holiness. Since the saint is united to Christ, he also has died to sin. If he has died to sin, he cannot continue living in it. He cannot continue in sin that grace may increase. Owen understands the union of Christ with his saints to mean not just that the power of the old self is *punished* in Christ's death, but that the

power of the old self is also *killed*. So, the cross of Christ is not only looked back on as the source of the saint's justification, but also as the ongoing source of his mortification and vivification, for by the Holy Spirit he is united to the death and the resurrection of Christ. In this way, the saint during his whole life continually experiences the outworking of his union with Christ in His death to sin and His alive to life. Thus, the union between Christ and the saint embraces the finished work of Christ's death and resurrection, in the sense that it rests in all that this death and resurrection have done for the saint's past, present and future.

Given the above, in contrast to the contemporary Evangelical understanding of sanctification as a "higher stage" than justification, Owen views it as a continuing event of daily dying to self and being raised anew accomplished in Christ's redemptive work within the formulation of the union of Christ with the saint. In other words, it is an ongoing process of growth in conformity to the image of Christ within the context of progressive sanctification. From the saint's standpoint, it is a continuing discipline that he undertakes at increasingly deeper levels, bringing more and more of himself to God in trust.

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